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Annual Retreat Addresses Alarming Figures on the Unmet Needs of Young Adults with Cancer

CINJ Experts Engage in Public Forum on Critical Concerns Outlined in Recent NCI Report

New Brunswick, N.J., May 31, 2007 – Excluding homicide, suicide and unintentional injury, cancer is the leading cause of death among 15 – 39 year olds. That’s according to a recent report issued by the National Cancer Institute (NCI), which shows cancer in this population represents a significant health problem and presents a broad range of challenges. That’s why during the Annual Retreat on Cancer Research in New Jersey, experts from The Cancer Institute of New Jersey (CINJ) today took part in an interactive public forum designed to develop a framework for action so that the needs of this unique group can be better addressed in the state.

The annual gathering, now in its eleventh year, encourages leading experts in the basic science and clinical aspects of cancer to join together to share their work with each other and the public; it is a joint venture between CINJ and the New Jersey Commission on Cancer Research. This year’s event was held on the Piscataway Campus of the UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

“Each year, we in the cancer community have an opportunity to come together and share our work with each other with that hope that we’ll be able to apply this information toward the development of new lines of treatment and prevention,” said Edmund Lattime, Ph.D., Associate Director for Education and Training at CINJ and Professor of Surgery, UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. Lattime, who also is the Co-Chair of the Retreat, notes this year’s topic especially warrants further exploration: “These latest findings show the challenges for this segment of the cancer population are severe. It is precisely the reason we meet in this fashion, so that we can tackle the problem head on and develop and implement new strategies to address the situation.”

The NCI Progress Review Group Report entitled: *Closing the Research Gap: Adolescents and Young Adults with Cancer* outlines some of the complex issues common to young adults with cancer including poor survival rates, serious gaps in research, late or missed diagnosis, substantial psychosocial barriers, and unmet support needs for survivors. The report indicates this particular population has seen little or no improvement in cancer survival rates for decades.

“Great strides have been made in recent years regarding the survival rate of children with cancer. This report obviously shows those numbers are not translating into the adolescent and young adult category,” said Regina Cunningham, Ph.D., R.N., AOCN, Chief Nursing Officer at CINJ and Assistant Professor of Family Medicine at UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. Cunningham, who discussed *Survivorship: Steps for Living* noted, “It is our collective responsibility to explore the reasons why that is

and then act on them.” Cunningham currently is conducting research on the transition of survivors back into the primary care setting.

Discussing the topic of *Treatment, Clinical Care and Research of Young Adults with Cancer* was Darlene G. Gibbon, M.D., Co-Director of Adolescent and Young Adult Oncology Clinical Services, Clinical Director, Gynecologic Oncology at CINJ and Assistant Professor of Obstetrics/Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences, UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. Gibbon is in the process of beginning a multi-disciplinary program at CINJ, which would specifically target and address the treatment and needs of the adolescent and young adult population. “Unfortunately, this is a group that is under-recognized and therefore at risk of not being properly served,” said Gibbon. “Because of their age, these patients may often times not know whether to seek treatment from a pediatric oncologist or an adult oncologist. Age also affects whether a young person is still on mom and dad’s insurance or is lucky enough to be in the workforce with his or her own coverage. The treatment of cancers in young adults and adolescents needs to be approached differently than pediatric or older adult patients and therefore it is imperative that we educate the public about the quality care available for these patients and how to obtain it.”

The report makes numerous recommendations, which were discussed heavily among the panel groups. Included were identifying the characteristics that distinguish the unique cancer burden in this population; providing education, training and communication to improve awareness, prevention, access and quality cancer care for such patients; creating the tools necessary to study the dilemma facing this group; ensuring excellence in service delivery and strengthening and promoting advocacy and support of the young adult cancer patient.

The public forum also featured a keynote speech by Matthew Zachary, an 11-year cancer survivor, who was diagnosed at age 21 with a brain tumor. In his motivational discussion “I’m Too Young for This!” Zachary discussed his battle with cancer and his journey back to life as a concert pianist and entrepreneur.

Also highlighted were numerous poster sessions on the latest in cancer research, with numerous presentations being submitted by leading CINJ researchers. One presentation focused on obesity, insulin resistance and lifestyle factors as implications for prostate cancer screening, while another focused on a population-based, case-control study in New Jersey dealing with active and passive smoking and the risk for endometrial cancer. Approximately 150 abstracts were made available to nearly 500 attendees.

About The Cancer Institute of New Jersey

The Cancer Institute of New Jersey is the state’s first and only National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center, and is dedicated to improving the prevention, detection, treatment and care of patients with cancer. CINJ’s physician-scientists engage in translational research, transforming their laboratory discoveries into clinical practice quite literally bringing research to life. The Cancer Institute of New Jersey is a Center of Excellence of UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. To support CINJ, please call The Cancer Institute of New Jersey Foundation at 1-888-333-CINJ.

The Cancer Institute of New Jersey Network is comprised of hospitals throughout the state and provides a mechanism to rapidly disseminate important discoveries into the community. Partner Hospitals: Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, Atlantic Health (Morristown Memorial Hospital, Overlook Hospital). Affiliate Hospitals: Bayshore Community Hospital, CentraState Healthcare System, Cooper University Hospital,* Jersey Shore University Medical Center, JFK Medical Center, Mountainside Hospital, Raritan Bay Medical Center, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital at Hamilton (CINJ-Hamilton), Saint

Peter's University Hospital, Somerset Medical Center, Southern Ocean County Hospital, The University Hospital/UMDNJ-New Jersey Medical School*, and University Medical Center at Princeton. *Academic Affiliate

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