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For Immediate Release

Physician Leaders Pilot Ways to Increase Workforce Diversity, Patients' Access to Interpreters, and Culturally Proficient Care

Special Projects in Place Statewide

San Francisco, April 8, 2008 – Physician leaders have a new prescription for clinics, health systems, and doctors' offices: Take a lesson in cultural proficiency and call me in the morning, so we can tackle this important work.

Pledging to remedy the diversity gap between California patients and the physicians who serve them, the leaders of 33 medical organizations together are leading ground-breaking efforts as The California Endowment's Medical Leadership Council on Cultural Proficiency (MLC).

Council members work to increase language access (including interpreter services), cultural proficiency, and workforce diversity in health care. The elected physician leaders and executive directors of medical specialty and county medical societies and other health organizations have been meeting biannually since 2002 with leaders of health plans and health systems, convened by The California Endowment.

Between meetings, the medical groups and the health systems conduct innovative projects to bring interpreter services to patients, increase the cultural proficiency of practicing physicians, and increase the number of ethnic and racial minority students entering the field of medicine.

"We, as a state, must do better in addressing the health care needs of California's racially and ethnically diverse health care consumers," said Robert K. Ross, MD, Chairman and CEO of The Endowment. "Research supports the conclusion that these folks often receive second-tier health care which results in serious health disparities. Increased access to health care interpreters, diversifying the health care workforce, and the provision of training to bridge the cultural chasm between health care consumers and health care professionals are all necessary and effective strategies. The Endowment has gathered together the state's health care leaders and is asking them to help solve these problems."

Latino, African American and some Asian populations are severely underrepresented among physicians, as evidenced by a ground-breaking study released last week by the Center for Health Professions at the University of California-San Francisco. (See: links.sfgate.com/ZCXC)

"We understand the consequences of a lack of diversity among physicians," said Leonard Fromer, MD, a California Academy of Family Physicians leader. "We know stories – like the patient who died in an emergency room because his physician could not understand his mother's explanation of his serious symptoms. The Medical Leadership Council is changing the conditions that lead to such outcomes – in part by focusing on ways to increase the diversity of students entering medical schools."

The Council has awarded one member, the Fresno-Madera Medical Society, for example, a workforce diversity pilot project grant to compile a directory of outreach programs, targeting middle school and high school students, that encourage careers in medicine and focus on diversity issues. This 'best practices' compendium will provide medical societies statewide with a list of ways their physician members personally can support in-the-field efforts.

Together, member organizations also have contributed to the first-of-its-kind, searchable Language Access Database (www.MedicalLeadership.org) that provides county-by-county listings for interpreters, organizations that provide health education services and materials in languages other than English, information about ways to improve cultural proficiency in health care, and more. Physicians, health care professionals, and the general public all can access the database and other resources on this Web site.

Effective communication in medical settings requires not just the ability to speak specific languages, but also the ability to deliver health care in a way that respects patients' cultural values, Fromer says. "A health care visit is very personal," he explained. "Physicians must be able to care for everyone from a Russian-speaking woman who may be facing domestic abuse at home, to a Spanish-speaking man recently diagnosed with diabetes, to an elderly Hmong-speaking woman with terminal cancer in ways they culturally can understand and feel comfortable."

Between 2002 and 2008, MLC members have completed more than 30 projects designed to increase language access, cultural proficiency, and healthcare workforce diversity in California. For more information about the Council, the Language Access Database, or the Web site, contact Executive Vice President Susan Hogeland, CAE, at the California Academy of Family Physicians, 415/345-8667. For more information about individual organizations' projects, see the contact list at the end of this press release.

Examples of Medical Leadership Council Projects & Contacts

- **California Endowment:** Supports MLC and other initiatives to increase language access, cultural proficiency, and healthcare workforce diversity: Ignatius Bau, JD, Director, Culturally Competent Health Systems. Media contact: Jeff Okey, 213-928-8622.
- **Fresno-Madera Medical Society:** Researching effective ways to encourage and support middle school and high school students in choosing medical careers. Media contact: Executive Director Sandy Palumbo, 559-224-4224 x14.
- **California Academy of Family Physicians:** Developed and distributes *Addressing Language Access Issues in Your Practice – A Toolkit for Physicians and Their Staff Members*, a collection of resources presenting a systems approach to redesigning medical office practices to provide the highest quality care possible to patients who speak limited English. Media contact: Executive Vice President Susan Hogeland, CAE, 415-345-8667.
- **American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, District IX:** Developed *Language Access Solutions for OB/GYN Medical Practices*, a set of practice and policy recommendations to promote language access and cultural proficiency among its physician members. Media contact: Executive Director Margaret Merritt, 916-920-8100.
- **California Health Care Safety Net Institute:** The California Health Care Safety Net Institute (SNI) ensures that public hospital systems can provide the best care to California's low-income, diverse populations. With a major focus on reducing disparities, SNI assists public hospital systems in improving language access and cultural proficiency, including providing model policies and procedures, helping establish videoconferencing medical interpreter systems, and training hospital teams to integrate

cultural proficiency in clinical practice. Media contact: Director Wendy Jamison, MPH, MPP, 510-874-7105.

Medical Leadership Council for Cultural Proficiency Members

Please contact the Executive Directors (or other noted contacts) of the following organizations for more information about their work to increase language access, cultural proficiency and workforce diversity in health care.

Alameda-Contra Costa Medical Association: 510-654-5383
American Academy of Pediatrics, District IX: 510-559-8383
American College of Emergency Physicians, California Chapter: 800-735-2237
American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists, District IX: 916-920-8100
American College of Physicians, California Chapter: 415-305-3258
Asian Pacific Islander American Health Forum: 415-954-9988
California Association of Public Hospitals & Health Systems: 510-874-7105
California Healthcare Interpreters Association: 916-444-1500
California Hospital Association – Peggy Wheeler, VP, Rural Health Care: 916-552-7689
California Medical Association Foundation: 916-551-2550
California Latino Medical Association: 323-266-2455
California Primary Care Association: 916-440-8170
Catholic Healthcare West – Eileen Barsi, Director of Community Benefit: 415-438-5571
Fresno-Madera Medical Society: 559-224-4224 x14
Golden State Medical Association: 310-327-9350
Kaiser Permanente – Gayle Tang, Dir. of Nat'l Linguistic & Cultural Programs: 510-271-6828
Los Angeles County Medical Society: 213-226-0301
Napa County Medical Society: 707-225-3688
Native Wellness & Advocacy: 619-508-8041
Orange County Medical Association: 714-978-1160
Riverside County Medical Association: 951-686-3342
St. Joseph Health System – Veronica Gutierrez: 714-347-7753
San Bernardino County Medical Society: 951-787-7700
San Francisco Medical Society: 415-561-0520 X237
San Joaquin County Medical Society: 209-954-7501
San Mateo County Medical Association: 650-312-1663
Santa Clara County Medical Association: 408-998-8850
Scripps Health – Clyde Beck, MD, Sr. Consultant-Community Health: 858-231-1124
Sierra-Sacramento Valley Medical Association: 916-452-2671
Solano County Medical Society: 707-225-3688
Sonoma County Medical Association: 707-525-4265
Stanislaus County Medical Society: 209-527-1704
Sutter Health – Traci Van, Community Benefit Coordinator: 916-286-6733
Wellpoint Health System, Lakshmi Dhanvanthari, MD, VP, Medical Director: 805-384-7855