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NATIONAL EXPERTS FEATURED IN HIV / HEPATITIS C SYMPOSIUM

The chairman and CEO of Hepatitis Foundation International, Thelma Teil, will keynote the 2006 North Carolina Symposium on Hepatitis C and HIV, set for March 30 and 31 in Durham. The first-ever event for medical professionals and community organizations was announced today at a meeting of partners in the PHICAS program, one of the symposium's sponsors.

"We are seeing a steady rise in Hep C and HIV infections in North Carolina," said Beth Stringfield, Executive Director of the Piedmont HIV Health Care Consortium. "We estimate that about 30 percent of the 25,000 state residents with HIV also have Hep C, which greatly impacts their treatment. As we worked with the PHICAS project to address co-infection issues, we saw a need to present comprehensive information to the medical community, which this symposium will accomplish."

The conference is sponsored by PHICAS (Piedmont HIV Integrated Community Access System), the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services HCV Program and Wake Forest University. It will be held at the Sheraton Imperial Hotel in Durham.

"The symposium is intended to increase both providers' and patients' basic understanding of Hep C, HIV and co-infection," Stringfield said. "We'll also look at how to integrate Hep C treatment, discuss treatment guidelines and learn about the emotional and mental effects of the disease and treatments."

Sessions for medical providers are targeted to primary care physicians, physician assistants, nursing professionals and medical specialists. Among the confirmed speakers Dr. Sam Pegram of Wake Forest University and North Carolina epidemiologist Jeff Engle.

Community provider sessions are designed for educators, mental health providers, health department personnel and counselors. Presenters include Laurie Schowalter from the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors, and Dr. Peter Leone, an associate professor of infectious diseases at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine.

Dr. Glenn Treisman, associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, will address a Friday joint session on mental health and substance abuse in special populations.

"There will also be several networking events," Stringfield said. "One of the strengths of this symposium is the opportunity to communicate across disciplines and begin building the kind of comprehensive care system that is needed by people impacted by HCV and HIV."

More information on PHICAS and the Symposium can be found at www.phicas.com.