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UNC/Piedmont Health program cited by magazine as a “Health Care Hero”

RALEIGH (May 24, 2013) – The Underserved Track in Family Medicine, a joint project of UNC Department of Family Medicine and Piedmont Health, has won a “Health Care Hero” award from the *Triangle Business Journal*. The awards honor individuals and organizations that are making a difference in health care.

The program is designed to address the critical shortfall of primary care physicians. North Carolina is among eight states facing the greatest challenge due to the worsening shortage; a 2011 study by the Sheps Center for Health Services Research reported that only 10 of the 408 graduates of North Carolina medical schools in 2005 are practicing primary care in rural parts of the state five years after graduation. Such a shortfall has the potential to cripple access to health care, resulting in increased emergency room visits and hospital readmissions. Consequentially, there will be significantly higher costs for the health-care system. Access to primary care is a method proven to improve health outcomes, increase patient satisfaction and dramatically reduce costs.

To help provide that care, Piedmont Health, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving access to high-quality, affordable medical care, and the Department of Family Medicine at the UNC School of Medicine partnered to create the Underserved and Rural Track in Family Medicine program. This partnership establishes the state’s first teaching health center to address the significant shortage of primary care physicians in rural and underserved communities. Specifically, this project supports a new training track for two additional family medicine residents per year at the Prospect Hill Community Health Center in southern Caswell County, which serves rural areas of Caswell, Alamance, Orange and Person counties. Over the course of the three years of the program, six family medicine residents will be added to serve those areas.

In announcing the Health Care Hero award winners, Bryan Hamilton, publisher of the *Triangle Business Journal*, stated: “Our winners this year represent another class of exceptional heroes. Whether serving those in need or working on breakthrough innovations in health care, these winners are changing people’s lives.”

Brian Toomey, CEO of Piedmont Health added: “It is significant that this program is based at a community health center. These centers are located in medically underserved areas and accept all patients and offer services on a sliding fee scale based on income. Community Health Centers provide the right care at the right place at the right cost.”

Piedmont Health operates six community health centers in central North Carolina dedicated to delivering high-quality, affordable health care. For more information, call (919) 933-8494 or visit www.piedmonthhealth.org.