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Enhancing the Lives of South Bronx Residents, Canyon Ranch Institute and Urban Health Plan Open New Health & Wellness Center

A proven health and wellness program model for how to improve the U.S. health system through a focus on prevention and health literacy gets started in the Bronx.

SOUTH BRONX, NY (October 29, 2009) – The non-profit Canyon Ranch Institute (CRI) and partner organization Urban Health Plan (UHP) celebrated the opening of a new health and wellness center at UHP, a network of federally qualified community health centers based in the South Bronx and Queens.

The Urban Health Plan, Inc. Health & Wellness Center, in Partnership with Canyon Ranch Institute — El Centro de Salud y Bienestar, en Cooperación con Canyon Ranch Institute — is “home base” for the Canyon Ranch Institute Life Enhancement Program at Urban Health Plan (CRI LEP at UHP). This program that has been shown to positively impact participants’ health and well-being is based on the best practices of Canyon Ranch health resort in Tucson, Arizona.

Richard Izquierdo, M.D., founder of UHP, said, “I want to thank one of my oldest patients, Dr. Richard Carmona and all the people at Canyon Ranch and Canyon Ranch Institute for being so supportive of the things that we do. Today, people say what we do is ‘culturally sensitive’ and they call us a medical home; these are all new concepts that are popular in medicine today, but at UHP, we’ve been doing it for over 35 years.”

The CRI LEP at UHP focuses on improving participants’ health literacy and increasing prevention by using an integrative approach to health and wellness that incorporates physical activity, nutrition, behavior change, and methods of stress reduction. The new Health & Wellness Center includes state-of-the-art exercise equipment and space for meditation, relaxation, and yoga.

One patient who participated in the CRI LEP at UHP said about her experience, “Now I read the labels on packaging, I eat smaller portions, I move my body, I have more confidence, I’m not stiff anymore, and I’ve lost nine pounds.”

Three CRI LEP at UHP classes have already graduated from the six-week program; two classes celebrated their graduation on October 29 during the formal opening and ribbon-cutting of the new Health & Wellness Center. Due to the success and popularity of the program – which is taught in both Spanish and English – there are currently over 175 patients referred to participate in the CRI Life Enhancement Program.

Participants in the first CRI Life Enhancement Program class at UHP demonstrated significant improvements in their personal health status based on a thorough evaluation before and after their

participation in the program. Participants lost weight, became less depressed, reduced their blood pressure, and improved their health literacy.

Canyon Ranch founder and CRI Board member Mel Zuckerman said, “This positive outcome was part of our vision when we started the non-profit Canyon Ranch Institute, and now it feels especially wonderful to contribute to the health of the South Bronx community. I saw my first baseball game in the Bronx and many of my relatives lived there, so it is personally rewarding to know that the Life Enhancement Program we developed over 20 years at Canyon Ranch is now available in the Bronx through the partnership between Urban Health Plan and Canyon Ranch Institute.”

“Data is accumulating to validate the ‘proof’ of this concept that seemed far-fetched when we first started working together in one of the most health disparate areas of our nation. We believe variations of the Life Enhancement Program are replicable nationally and internationally,” said CRI President Richard H. Carmona, M.D., M.P.H., FACS, 17th Surgeon General of the United States (2002-2006), and vice-chairman of Canyon Ranch.

Festivities at the opening of the Health & Wellness Center included a ribbon-cutting ceremony, presentations by UHP Founder Richard Izquierdo, M.D.; UHP President and CEO Paloma Izquierdo-Hernandez, M.P.H.; CRI President Richard H. Carmona, M.D., M.P.H., FACS, 17th Surgeon General of the United States (2002-2006); CRI Executive Director Jennifer Cabe, M.A., and testimonials from participants.

“What is happening at Urban Health Plan and here in the South Bronx because of this Life Enhancement Program is a model for what should be happening in health care reform nationally,” UHP President and CEO Paloma Izquierdo-Hernandez told the group of more than 300 residents of the South Bronx as well as others who had traveled to UHP to see the new Health & Wellness Center.

Later that day at an event celebrating the 35th anniversary of UHP and Dr. Izquierdo’s 80th birthday, CRI was awarded the Bronx Spirit Award, which recognizes individuals or organizations that help to enhance the health and well-being of the UHP patient population and the Bronx community.

The relationship between UHP Founder Dr. Izquierdo and CRI President Dr. Carmona started more than 50 years ago when Dr. Carmona was just six years old, sometimes homeless, and sometimes living with parents, brothers, and sister at his abuelita’s small apartment. When he was sick, his abuelita (grandmother) would take him to see Dr. Izquierdo, then a neighborhood doctor who ran a small health clinic and provided free and low-cost health services to patients in need, especially in the Hispanic community.

“She had very little money, so Abuelita usually paid Dr. Izquierdo with arroz con pollo – her chicken and rice dish was famous in her neighborhood,” remembered Dr. Carmona. “Dr. Izquierdo accepted this food as if it was pure gold. He shared advice with us about how to be healthy. He listened to his patients and knew about our lives. We were family. Years later, when I spoke with my own patients, I understood that respecting their human dignity was as important to their health and well-being as any medical treatment I could offer.”

“In the midst of political battles about health care reform, Urban Health Plan and Canyon Ranch Institute have worked tenaciously for three years on this extraordinary program translating the best practices of Canyon Ranch to the South Bronx, and we are measuring substantial improvements in patients’ health literacy, health behavior, and overall physical and emotional well-being,” said Jennifer Cabe, M.A., executive director of CRI. “The CRI LEP at UHP is evidence that people, families, and communities can benefit from an integrated approach to health and wellness.”

Visit www.canyonranchinstitute.org/partnerships/crilep/uhpdp/ for photos and more information about the Canyon Ranch Institute Life Enhancement Program at Urban Health Plan.

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About Urban Health Plan

Urban Health Plan (UHP) is a network of federally qualified community health centers based in the South Bronx and Queens. Its mission is to improve the health status of underserved communities. In 2008, UHP

served 31,000 patients through 171,000 patient visits at four clinic sites, five school-based clinics, and four off-sites. It has served the Hunts Point, Mott Haven and other surrounding communities of the Bronx since 1974.

In 2006 UHP received the National Exemplary Award from the United States Environmental Protection Agency for its efforts to reduce asthma rates in Hunts Point. It has been named one of the top twenty-five Hispanic not-for-profits in the country by Hispanic Business Magazine for the past three years. In the summer of 2009 UHP was named one of the top twenty community health centers in the country and received the Nicholas E. Davies Award for Excellence from the Health Information Management Systems Society for its excellence in the use of electronic health records.

Visit www.urbanhealthplan.org for more information.

About Canyon Ranch Institute

Canyon Ranch Institute catalyzes the possibility of optimal health for all people by translating the best practices of Canyon Ranch and our partners to help educate, inspire, and empower every person to prevent disease and embrace a life of wellness.

Canyon Ranch Institute works with our partners to help:

- Accelerate a cultural transformation to redefine individual and community health in terms of disease prevention rather than disease treatment;
- Integrate and translate innovative and evidence-based wellness best practices into the fundamental knowledge and social base of every community;
- Eliminate health disparities by ensuring that all people have the ability and opportunity to embrace a life of wellness.

Visit www.canyonranchinstitute.org for more information.