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RETIRED DOCTORS PROVIDE SOLUTION TO THE HEALTHCARE CRISIS *Volunteers in Medicine Ease Pain of Uninsured at Free Clinics Across the Country*

Burlington, VT (November, 2008) In over 69 communities across the country, a solution to the healthcare crisis has been found in the nation's 250,000+ retired physicians and 350,000 retired nurses. Volunteers in Medicine (VIM) is an organization whose mission is to promote and guide the development of a national network of free clinics emphasizing the use of retired medical and lay volunteers to care for the uninsured within a culture of caring.

Volunteers in Medicine (VIM) began in Hilton Head, South Carolina. In 1992, one out of three people who lived on Hilton Head Island had no access to health care. At the same time, a number of retired medical personnel (physicians, nurses, dentists) expressed an interest in finding a way to continue practicing their profession on a voluntary, part-time basis to help those without access to care. So these two groups were brought together to create the first Volunteers in Medicine Clinic. Since then, 68 VIM clinics have opened in 22 states across the country.

"No community can be truly healthy if a significant portion of the population is excluded from basic health care services," says Amy Hamlin, executive director of Volunteers in Medicine. "In the absence of a national health policy that includes health care for everyone, concerned citizens need to find other solutions to provide the medically under-served with the health care services they desperately need. Volunteers in Medicine delivers on such solution."

The statistics are staggering; 47 million people in this country have no medical insurance. Another 25 million are underinsured, up 60% in just four years with middle and higher income families comprising most of that increase. The impact on the infrastructure of towns and cities is equally staggering. When people are injured or sick, they can't work, effecting employers and their ability to provide goods and services. When people postpone seeking medical care, their medical conditions get worse and more costly to treat. And without adequate health insurance, Emergency rooms become the default. This is particularly difficult, as emergency departments have seen cuts in reimbursements, while at the same time ER visits are at record highs across the country. This creates a cost-shift, which means higher premiums for everyone.

Even if everyone were to become insured tomorrow, there is not enough current or future primary care capacity to provide health care to all Americans. Over one-third of active physicians are over age 55 and with many choosing early retirement, there will be a deficit of primary care physicians by 2020. Faced with lower reimbursement rates, excessive work loads, and rising medical school costs, fewer graduates are choosing primary care. "Empowering retired physicians to practice the "pure medicine" they crave without the "business" of medicine

is the common sense approach that Volunteers in Medicine provides. This is one solution to improving the long term health our country," continued Hamlin.

Some 313,000 of the active physician population are over 55. This means that 36% of active physicians are set to retire by 2020 while at the same time there are only 105,000 physicians in residency training. Contrary to predictions in the 1980's and 1990's, there will not be a surplus of physicians in the 21st Century but rather we will face a physician shortage. "The statistics on current and projected physician numbers further support the ongoing effectiveness that the VIM model will have in improving the healthcare of our country long term," continued Hamlin.

For more information on Volunteers in Medicine and for a list of our member clinics, please visit www.volunteersinmedicine.org.

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