

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 25, 2007

NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund Launches *CheckMeds NC* for Medicare Prescription Drug Program Enrollees

Pharmacists engaged statewide to provide Medication Therapy Management to NC Seniors

Raleigh, NC – The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) Commission launched a unique and innovative statewide program to provide Medication Therapy Management services for North Carolina seniors. The *CheckMeds NC* program kicked off today with an announcement by HWTF Commission Chair Lt. Governor Bev Perdue at the North Hills Kerr Drug store. North Carolina is the first state in the nation to launch such a service for its seniors.

“*CheckMeds NC* is a groundbreaking program for seniors in our state,” said Lt. Governor Bev Perdue. “This critical pharmacist counseling will not only help our seniors save money, it will improve their health or save their lives.”

Although, Medication Therapy Management is a required service under the federal Medicare Part D legislation, prescription drug plans are neither required to provide it in a face-to-face setting, nor to use a pharmacist to conduct this in-depth counseling session. As a result, most plans have been providing this service over the phone using primarily non-pharmacists, which greatly diminishes its effectiveness.

Building upon its community-based Medication Assistance Program (MAP) launched in 2002, HWTF has placed both retail and community pharmacists under contract to counsel eligible seniors on the most appropriate and cost-effective use of their federal drug benefit. All North Carolina seniors, ages 65 and older who are enrolled in a Medicare prescription drug plan are eligible to receive this free service at participating pharmacies. The HWTF Commission has allocated \$2 million over the next two years to fund the program.

Services include a comprehensive “brown bag review” session between the senior and the specially-trained *CheckMeds NC* pharmacist. This initial review consists of a one-on-one meeting where the senior is asked to bring all his/her prescription, over-the-counter, and herbal medicines, vitamins and supplements. The review may result in advice, patient education, and/or follow up with the prescribing physician to discuss medication changes that may be helpful to the senior.

This program is very timely as seniors across the nation are getting ready to make their Medicare Part D plan selection for 2008 since the open enrollment period begins on November 15. Participating in a comprehensive medication review will enable seniors to optimize their regimens and make the most appropriate plan choices.

Pharmacists in both chain and independent pharmacies across the state have been invited to take the free online training to become *CheckMeds NC* participating pharmacists, enabling them to be reimbursed for services they provide to eligible seniors.

“The stark reality is that the costs associated with adverse events related to inappropriate medication use actually exceed the total cost of all medications dispensed in the U.S.” said Mark Gregory, Kerr Drug Vice President of Pharmacy and Government Relations, “and nearly half of all medications prescribed for chronic conditions are not taken according to directions. Our healthcare system is in vital need of solutions to these problems, and *CheckMeds NC* takes our state a long way toward such a solution.”

Medication Therapy Management is a proven method of saving lives and reducing overall health care costs by reducing potentially harmful drug-to-drug interactions. Nationally, as many as 200,000 deaths and an estimated 16% of all hospital admissions are linked to medication-related problems.

For more information about *CheckMeds NC*, go to the website: www.CheckMedsnc.com.

About the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund makes North Carolina stronger, both physically and economically, by funding programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, HWTF has invested \$143 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$102 million to fund prescription drug assistance programs. For more information, please visit www.HealthWellNC.com.

###