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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 10, 2009

NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund announces new health disparities fellows
Training begins at Duke University Feb. 9-11

Raleigh, NC – The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) announces its first class of fellows selected for the newly created fellowship program focusing on health disparities in North Carolina. The fellowship program engages and provides extensive development opportunities for talented public health or social work professionals to help close the health disparities gap.

The project is funded and directed by the North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) as part of its statewide Eliminating Health Disparities Initiative. HWTF has allocated \$21 million toward the overall initiative, a multi-pronged approach that includes 42 community grants (Phases I and II), statewide social marketing campaigns, and efforts to increase the cultural competency of health care providers and to increase minority participation in the healthcare workforce. HWTF is partnering with the Duke Global Health Institute to manage the fellowship.

The two-year program will include 20 days of course instruction during the first year led by faculty at Duke University and North Carolina Central University. Faculty mentors at Duke and NCCU will assist fellows with the development of a community-based project in the second year of the program. The first class of the NC Health Disparity Fellowship Program meets this week (February 9-11) on the Duke University campus to participate in the first of four curriculum modules over this two year period.

“This week marks the beginning of a partnership with an impressive group of professionals who are committed to leading our state’s efforts to addressing health disparities through effective community-based and statewide projects,” said Vandana Shah, HWTF Executive Director. “We are pleased to announce the first class of fellows in what promises to be a far-reaching endeavor designed to building a strong cadre of skilled individuals in the health care workforce who will be especially attuned to identifying and eliminating health disparities.”

The first class of fellows includes:

- **Vicki Collie-Akers** is currently a Research Assistant at Elizabeth City State University and works on a project that examines mammography utilization by African-American women.
- **Valerie Collins Russell** currently works for the NC Division of Public Health where she is Branch Health of Injury and Violence Prevention.
- **Crystal Dempsey** is currently the Regional Health Disparities Coordinator for the Hertford County Public Health Authority.
- **Jennifer Fisher** is the Health Disparities Initiatives Manager for the North Carolina Academy of Family Physicians, working with the organization’s members to increase their knowledge and awareness of the Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) standards developed by the National Office of Minority Health.
- For the past five years **Joseph Martinez** has served as Executive Director of FIRST at Blue Ridge, Inc., a 105 bed residential men’s substance abuse treatment and vocational training Center outside Asheville, NC.

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 \$199 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$102 million to fund prescription drug assistance programs. For more information, please visit www.HealthWellNC.com.

ABOUT THE DUKE GLOBAL HEALTH INSTITUTE

Duke University created the Duke Global Health Institute in 2006 to address health disparities around the world and in our own community. The Institute works with faculty and students from all nine schools at Duke University (undergraduate, graduate and professional) to study and respond to global health issues from a multi-disciplinary perspective. The Institute considers not only the diseases that cause health disparities, but the social determinants of these diseases, such as poverty, gender, environment and globalization. Dr. Michael Merson, an internationally recognized expert in the study of HIV/AIDS, is the director of the Duke Global Health Institute. <http://www.globalhealth.duke.edu>

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