

# University News Service

## News Release

February 8, 2008

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

CONTACT:

Michele Fisher

CINJ

(732) 235-9872

[fisherm2@umdnj.edu](mailto:fisherm2@umdnj.edu)

Jerry Carey

UMDNJ

(856) 566-6171

[careyge@umdnj.edu](mailto:careyge@umdnj.edu)

### **New Program Improves Science Skills and Raises Breast Cancer Awareness in Teens**

*UMDNJ-School of Public Health and CINJ collaborate on pilot program*

(PISCATAWAY) –The Center for School and Community Health Education at the UMDNJ-School of Public Health and the LIFE Center at The Cancer Institute of New Jersey (CINJ) have teamed up to provide high school biology teachers with a new program that helps enhance their students’ scientific skills while raising their awareness about breast cancer.

Educators from the two centers are currently pilot-testing “Using Biology and Genetics to Understand Cancer” with more than 30 high school teachers from throughout the state. During this one-day workshop, the teachers learn how the new curriculum can guide students through a case-based scenario that centers on 14-year old fraternal twins who discover that their mother has been diagnosed with breast cancer. The curriculum focuses on breast cancer to enhance the students’ problem solving skills while expanding their knowledge of genetics, how cancer develops and the steps the students can take to reduce their personal risk of the disease.

“The goal of the curriculum is to improve science skills and increase awareness of breast cancer among high school students,” said Laura Hemminger, director of the Center for School and Community Health Education at the UMDNJ-School of Public Health. “In the classroom, students work with the twins’ website to explore the scientific and psychological issues associated with breast cancer. At critical decision points, the students are asked to use their knowledge of the disease to share information on the twins’ blog.”

The pilot program, which was developed with support from the Val Skinner Foundation, the Central and South Jersey Affiliate of the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, and the Renee Shatz Amdur Fund, was first offered to teachers on Jan. 30, in Piscataway. A second session will be held on Feb. 7, at Absegami High School in Galloway Township. Teachers will then implement the program this spring.

Deborah Toppmeyer, M.D., director, New Jersey Comprehensive Breast Care Center at CINJ; and associate professor of medicine at UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, says the program is unique, “Since breast cancer is a topic which is not widely discussed in the classroom setting, this curriculum is key in increasing awareness of the disease, among young women especially.” Dr. Toppmeyer also is the director of CINJ’s LIFE (Ladies Professional

Golf Association in the Fight to Eradicate breast cancer) Center, which is designed to address the needs of young women with the disease.

According to the American Cancer Society more than nearly 180,000 patients nationwide were diagnosed with breast cancer last year, with a little more than 6,000 new cases in New Jersey. It's statistics like those that Hemminger and Toppmeyer note can be addressed with education such as this.

### **About The Cancer Institute of New Jersey**

The Cancer Institute of New Jersey is the state's first and only National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center, and is dedicated to improving the prevention, detection, treatment and care of patients with cancer. CINJ's physician-scientists engage in translational research, transforming their laboratory discoveries into clinical practice quite literally bringing research to life. The Cancer Institute of New Jersey is a center of excellence of UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. To support CINJ, please call the Cancer Institute of New Jersey Foundation at 1-888-333-CINJ.

The Cancer Institute of New Jersey Network is comprised of hospitals throughout the state and provides a mechanism to rapidly disseminate important discoveries into the community. Partner Hospital: Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital. Affiliate Hospitals: Bayshore Community Hospital, ContraState Healthcare System, Cooper University Hospital\*, Jersey Shore University Medical Center, JFK Medical Center, Morristown Memorial Hospital, Overlook Hospital, Raritan Bay Medical Center, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital at Hamilton (CINJ-Hamilton), Saint Peter's University Hospital, Somerset Medical Center, Southern Ocean County Hospital, The University Hospital/UMDNJ-New Jersey Medical School\*, and University Medical Center at Princeton. (\*Academic Affiliate)

### **About the UMDNJ-School of Public Health**

The UMDNJ-School of Public Health ([www.sph.umdj.edu](http://www.sph.umdj.edu)) is the nation's first collaborative school of public health and is sponsored by the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey in cooperation with Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, and New Jersey Institute of Technology.

The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ) is the nation's largest free-standing public health sciences university with more than 5,500 students attending the state's three medical schools, its only dental school, a graduate school of biomedical sciences, a school of health related professions, a school of nursing and its only school of public health, on five campuses. Last year, there were more than two million patient visits to UMDNJ facilities and faculty at campuses in Newark, New Brunswick/Piscataway, Scotch Plains, Camden and Stratford. UMDNJ operates University Hospital, a Level I Trauma Center in Newark, and University Behavioral HealthCare, a mental health and addiction services network.