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College of Medicine Eager to Continue Work Toward National Center for Rural Health Professions

Rockford, IL., -- A Congressional appropriation of \$1.5 million takes the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford one step closer to the construction of a \$24 million, 72,000 square-foot building to house the National Center for Rural Health Professions.

Based on the fact that 75 percent of Illinois' rural counties are medically underserved, the College of Medicine began the Rural Medical Education Program (RMED) in 1993. In 2000, the Rural Health Professions Education, Evaluation and Research Program (RPEER) was established to facilitate the training of nurses, dentists, pharmacists, mental health social workers and public health administrators to work in rural communities. The expansion of both RMED and RPEER has exhausted the available space at the College of Medicine.

To date, preliminary architectural schematics and a space analysis have been completed for the new building construction. A committee has also been formed to investigate the feasibility of local, private philanthropy to be partnered with state and federal funding. The feasibility committee is being led by Larry Gloyd, chairman emeritus of CLARCOR and guided by the expertise of The Alford Group Inc., from Evanston. Completion of the study is expected in June.

College officials are very appreciative of Congressman Don Manzullo's efforts in helping to acquire the funds that will be used to complete planning for the building, as well as site preparation. "We are grateful to Congressman Manzullo and his staff," Bernard Salafsky, dean of the College of Medicine said. "This commitment by Congress signals that the College of Medicine in Rockford, Illinois is to be recognized as the National Center for Rural Health Professions Education, and provides the first important step in raising the necessary funds to bring this project to reality."

Ray Kovach, director of advancement at the College of Medicine also applauded Manzullo's efforts. "Rockford will gain national and international distinction as the site of the National Center for Rural Health Professions, and enhance its standing as a center for medical training and treatment," Kovach said. "In addition, the National Center will host annual national and international rural health conferences and workshops to disseminate research findings and share information on program development and evaluation, bringing hundreds of visitors to our city."