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## **College of Medicine Receives Grant for Center of Excellence in Rural Health to Address Health Disparities**

Rockford, IL., -- Establishing a new Center of Excellence in Rural Health at the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford will provide unique opportunities for health professionals, researchers and students to address health disparities in rural settings through research, education and service.

Under a \$6.4 million grant awarded by the National Institutes of Health's National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities, the Project EXPORT Center of Excellence in Rural Health will support the advancement of health disparities research and training through the development of innovative community partnership models, particularly in rural and underserved communities.

The Rockford Center of Excellence is one of 33 across the country receiving a total of \$32 million over the next four years under the Project EXPORT: Centers of Excellence in Partnerships for Community Outreach and Research on Disparities in Health and Training initiative at NIH. The NCMHD was designated by Congress to lead, coordinate, support and assess the NIH research effort to reduce and ultimately eliminate health disparities as they affect racial and ethnic communities and medically underserved individuals.

The persistence of a disproportionate burden of disease and illness that continues to be borne by racial and ethnic minority populations and the rural and urban poor is the ultimate challenge we hope to address through the new Center of Excellence," Michael Glasser, director of the center, assistant dean of Rural Health Professions at the College of Medicine, said, "or some rural populations and the economically disadvantaged, in particular, the gap in health status and health outcomes is widening and we need to understand why."

Bernard Salafsky, Ph.D., regional dean of the College of Medicine, sees the grant award as another step toward a promising future for the College of Medicine. "The likelihood that this grant was one of the few given nationally to attack issues of disparity in rural communities signals the unique achievements and coming promise of the College of Medicine as it moves to assume the role of a National Center for Rural Health Professions," Salafsky said.

Other collaborating partners in the Project EXPORT Center of Excellence in Rural Health are the Center for Rural Health Professions at the College of Medicine at Rockford, the Illinois Area Health Education Consortium, the University of Illinois at Chicago Health Research and Policy Centers and the University of Illinois Champaign Urbana Extension Service.

We believe that by involving communities in partnerships with us in the work of this new Center and through training opportunities for health professionals and students that we will be able to develop new approaches to mitigating disparities in health," said Glasser.