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For Immediate Release

AFAR's MSTAR Program, an Exceptional Public-Private Partnership, Addresses Shortage of Geriatric Medicine Physicians

Unless Addressed, Geriatrician Shortage May Reach Crisis Proportions As Aging Population Grows

NEW YORK, NY (June 29, 2012) — One hundred forty-seven students from some of the nation's top medical schools will soon enter a unique program geared toward addressing the shortage of physicians specially trained to care for America's older adults – a shortage that is expected to get far worse in coming years.

According to the American Geriatrics Society, despite rapid growth in the elderly population, the ratio of geriatricians (geriatric medicine physicians) to seniors will significantly decrease over the next few decades – from one geriatrician for every 2,620 Americans age 75 and older today, to one geriatrician for every 3,798 older Americans in 2030. The American Federation for Aging Research's (AFAR's) Medical Student Training in Aging Research (MSTAR) Program, an initiative funded through a private-public partnership, seeks to address this issue by exposing future physicians to geriatric medicine experiences early in their careers.

The MSTAR Program gives these gifted medical students the opportunity to participate in a summer of aging-related research, education, and clinical training at National Institute on Aging–funded training centers and at some of the nation's top-tier academic institutions. The short-term scholarships, which range from 8 to 12 weeks, provide students with monthly stipends of approximately \$1,750. Fifty medical students are supported by private funding and will participate in the MSTAR Program at their home institutions this year, while 97 students will receive financial support through the National Institute on Aging and conduct their program at NIA's training centers.

Major funders of the MSTAR Program include MetLife Foundation, The John A. Hartford Foundation, and the National Institute on Aging (NIA). Several other funders provide additional support. Now in their third year of funding MSTAR, MetLife Foundation has committed \$640,000 to date.

“MetLife Foundation is pleased to support this initiative to attract more students to enter geriatric training programs,” said Dennis White, president and CEO of MetLife Foundation. “This support addresses a growing health problem of too few doctors to care for a rapidly aging population.”

Geriatricians are medical doctors who are specially trained in assessing, diagnosing, and treating

the problems that are especially common in people as they age. Board certified in internal or family medicine, these physicians have a minimum of one year of additional clinical training in geriatric medicine.

“Our program aims to introduce medical students to the field of geriatric medicine,” said AFAR Executive Director Stephanie Lederman, EdM. “We hope this will encourage many of them to pursue long-term career paths in studying and treating age-related diseases and conditions.”

Eighty-nine percent of MSTAR participants report that their summer experiences increased their sensitivity to the needs of older adults and their desire to include older adults in their practice. An evaluation of the MSTAR program showed that, of early program participants who completed their training and entered medical practice, 20 percent now practice geriatric medicine or aging-related specialty medicine.

“I would enthusiastically recommend this program to anyone regardless of their interest in becoming a geriatrician,” says Sydney Harvey, a recent MSTAR graduate. “We will all be working with older adults in our careers, and it is important to understand their unique considerations in the clinical setting. I am so glad I was able to participate in the MSTAR program.”

According to a [recent poll by the John A. Hartford Foundation](#), large majorities of older Americans experience significant and troubling gaps in their primary care. Only seven percent of adults received all of the seven important primary care services that are standard and critical elements of geriatric assessment. Fifty-two percent reported receiving none or only one service, and 78 percent received fewer than half. These included such services as annual medication reviews, falls assessments, and depression screening.

About the American Federation for Aging Research

Founded in 1981, the American Federation for Aging Research (AFAR) has championed the cause and supported the funding of science in healthier aging. Due to the shortage of physicians and researchers dedicated to the bioscience of aging, AFAR partners with foundations, corporations and individuals to fund important research into the fundamental mechanism of aging, age-related health, and diseases such as Alzheimer’s disease, cancer, heart disease, and other illnesses. For more information, please visit www.afar.org. For a listing of the 2012 MSTAR awardees go to <http://www.afar.org/grantees/years/2012-grantees#2>.