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Karmanos Cancer Institute to Launch Health Initiative Focused on Environmentally-Associated Cancers

Wednesday 21st of October 2009 11:12

DETROIT, Oct. 21 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The Barbara Ann Karmanos Cancer Institute, in cooperation with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan (BCBSM), will launch a targeted health initiative in January 2010 focused on environmentally-associated cancers.

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By the end of this year, according to the American Cancer Society, it is estimated that 1,479,350 new cases of cancer will be reported in this country. According to Karmanos Interim President and CEO Ann G. Schwartz, Ph.D., MPH, approximately 70 percent of all cancers are linked to occupational and environmental causes, including tobacco use and diet, based on information from the National Institutes of Health (1).

"A medical evidence-based approach will be presented to doctors participating in BCBSM's Physician Group Incentive Program (PGIP) in early December," Dr. Schwartz said. "The initiative is being designed to detect cancers and other serious illness resulting from exposure to arsenic and asbestos, two of the state's most frequently encountered carcinogens."

Director and author of the initiative Michael Harbut, M.D., MPH, FCCP, of Karmanos, an occupational and environmental medical expert, said that by utilizing existing data that has identified workplace and environmental arsenic and asbestos, "we can determine who is at risk, what preventive care may be recommended and more accurately diagnose and treat those at risk because of the water they drink or air they breathe."

Dr. Harbut said that Karmanos "will offer this program to physicians to accurately identify who is at risk for disease before symptoms become apparent. It is not unusual for people to be unaware that they have even been exposed to these toxins."

Asbestos and arsenic have been singled out because their impact continues to take a serious health toll on Michigan's residents. Michigan has the nation's largest arsenic-contaminated water table, located primarily in the southeastern part of the state, and an estimated 300,000 homes with asbestos-contaminated attic insulation.

Even low levels of exposure to asbestos can cause asbestosis -- a potentially fatal disease of the lungs -- as well as lung cancer and mesothelioma, an extremely aggressive cancer of the covering of the lungs and

intestines. Smokers are 50 times more likely to develop lung cancer if they also are exposed to asbestos. In addition, colon cancer has been associated with asbestos exposure. There is a latency period from time of first exposure to clinical identification of disease of 15-40 years. Contrary to popular belief, asbestos has never been banned in the United States.

Note: (1) Cancer and the environment: What you need to know, what you can do (2003). NIH Publication No. 03-2039.

About the Barbara Ann Karmanos Cancer Institute

Located in mid-town Detroit, Michigan, the Barbara Ann Karmanos Cancer Institute is one of 40 National Cancer Institute-designated comprehensive cancer centers in the United States. Caring for nearly 6,000 new patients annually on a budget of \$216 million, conducting more than 700 cancer-specific scientific investigation programs and clinical trials, the Karmanos Cancer Institute is among the nation's best cancer centers. Through the commitment of 1,000 staff, including nearly 300 faculty members, and supported by thousands of volunteer and financial donors, the Institute strives to prevent, detect and eradicate all forms of cancer. For more information call 1-800-KARMANOS or go to www.karmanos.org.

SOURCE Barbara Ann Karmanos Cancer Institute

Via PR Newswire - PRNewswire.co.uk

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Send comments and feedback to:

Peter Barfoot Managing Director, BioPortfolio Ltd.

UK Tel: (+44) 1300 321501

USA Voicemail and Fax: (+1) 415 680 2472

[Peter Barfoot peter.barfoot@bioportfolio.com](mailto:peter.barfoot@bioportfolio.com)

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