ATLANTA... A new report from The Carter Center and the American College of Physicians (ACP), “Five Prescriptions for Ensuring the Future of Primary Care,” argues that an overhaul of the primary care education system—including adopting more rigorous training in mental illness diagnosis and treatment—is necessary to fully implement reform of the U.S. health care system. The report emerged from discussions among thought-leaders from diverse backgrounds and perspectives during the Health Education Summit held at The Carter Center in October 2010, funded with grant support from the United Health Foundation.

“Primary care clinicians—including physicians, nurse practitioners and physician assistants—encourage people with complex health needs to engage in self-management and coordinated care plans,” said Michael S. Barr, MD, FACP, senior vice president for the American College of Physician’s Division of Medical Practice, Professionalism & Quality, and co-chair of the meeting. “However, the effectiveness of these efforts is often limited by the lack of resources and training needed to address behavioral and mental health conditions.”

"In the case of mental health conditions alone—which affect one-quarter of Americans each year—billions of medical dollars and other valuable resources are wasted because training programs are not adequately preparing clinicians to recognize and treat these disorders appropriately in the primary care setting,” said John Bartlett, MD, MPH, senior adviser, at the Carter Center’s Primary Care Initiative, and the other co-chair of the meeting. “As a result, millions of people are suffering unnecessarily."

Common themes from the “Five Prescriptions for Ensuring the Future of Primary Care” include: changing curriculums and teaching to provide more training in team-oriented settings and to integrate behavioral health care diagnosis and treatment into the primary care setting; leveraging existing funding mechanisms and creating new incentives to facilitate greater adoption of primary care careers among young health professionals; and
finally, stimulating a broader research agenda to inform primary care practice and health training of the future.

“Our primary care system is sick, but we have five prescriptions for physicians and other health care professionals to heal the system,” said ACP president Virginia L. Hood, MBBS, MPH, FACP, “and an important part of this is ensuring behavioral health care is better integrated into primary care settings.”

Editor’s Note:

- In October 2010, The Carter Center’s Primary Care Initiative, part of the Mental Health Program, in partnership with the American College of Physicians and the United Health Foundation, convened some of the nation’s leading experts to discuss the educational and training gaps in today’s health education systems for primary care, behavioral health care, and health promotion. The proceedings from this meeting and recommendations for improving primary care education are included in the report, “Five Prescriptions for Ensuring the Future of Primary Care”.

- To learn more about the Carter Center’s Mental Health Program and Primary Care Initiative: [http://cartercenter.org/health/mental_health/index.html](http://cartercenter.org/health/mental_health/index.html)

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AMERICAN COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS (ACP)
The American College of Physicians ([www.acponline.org](http://www.acponline.org)) is the largest medical specialty organization and the second-largest physician group in the United States. ACP members include 130,000 internal medicine physicians (internists), related subspecialists, and medical students. Internists specialize in the prevention, detection, and treatment of illness in adults. Follow ACP on Twitter ([www.twitter.com/acpinternists](http://www.twitter.com/acpinternists)) and Facebook ([www.facebook.com/acpinternists](http://www.facebook.com/acpinternists)).

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