

Elizabeth Lynch, (914) 997-4286, elynch@marchofdimes.com
Todd Dezen, (914) 997-4608, tdezen@marchofdimes.com
Joan Scott, 410-583-0600; jscott@nchpeg.org

**NEW COMPUTERIZED FAMILY HISTORY AIMED AT SCREENING FOR
PRETERM BIRTH AND OTHER INHERITED DISEASES**

March of Dimes and Partners Begin Testing New Electronic Tool

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y., Sept. 21, 2011 – A new computerized family history tool being tested by the March of Dimes and its partners can help health care providers take a detailed family history during the first prenatal visit to help screen for inherited conditions and preterm birth, as recommended in guidelines issued earlier this year by the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

Together with its partners – the National Coalition for Health Professional Education in Genetics, the Genetic Alliance, and the Massachusetts General Hospital– the March of Dimes will begin piloting their new family history electronic tool in several clinical settings, including a federally funded health center, putting family medical history at doctors’ fingertips.

Development of this new electronic tool was made possible through a three-year \$1.2 million grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration, Genetic Services Branch. Initial testing of the tool was recently completed at Tufts Medical Center, and long term testing will continue this year at:

- Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, Ma.
- Maine-Dartmouth Family Medicine Residency Program in Augusta and Fairfield, Maine.
- Montefiore Medical Center Comprehensive Family Care Center, Bronx, NY
- Mountain Area Health Education Center, Asheville, NC.
- Community Health Network, Indianapolis, IN.

“Our goal is to provide this new electronic family history tool to help health care providers determine women’s risk for problems during pregnancy so they can take steps to improve the chance of having full-term pregnancies and healthy babies,” said Siobhan Dolan, MD, a consultant to the March of Dimes and an obstetrician gynecologist and clinical geneticist at Montefiore Medical Center/Albert Einstein College of Medicine.

The family history guidelines, published in the March issue of Obstetrics & Gynecology, is the first statement by the College stressing the critical role of family history, the health information about a person and his or her close relatives, in assessing the risk of health problems, particularly in obstetrical care. The US Surgeon General launched its own Family History Project in 2004 called My Family Health Portrait (<http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/portrait/index.html>)

Family health history is a critical factor in determining a person's risk for health problems such as miscarriage, preterm birth, birth defects, heart disease, cancer and diabetes, the March of Dimes says. Family health history can help health care providers screen and assess risk for many genetic conditions, some of which can be identified through testing and, more importantly, some of which can be treated through early intervention.

Using state of the art technology, and building on the HughesRiskApp platform developed at Partners Healthcare for hereditary cancer risk, this new tool enables doctors to apply a sophisticated understanding of genomics and family history to give babies a healthier start in life. Patients will fill out a standardized family history questionnaire in their doctor's office using a computerized tablet, rather than pen and paper. The information will then be analyzed electronically, and the tool will provide red flags and recommendations for health care providers based on current professional guidelines. On the basis of this information, health care providers may be prompted to ask the patient more questions, or refer her to a genetic specialist.

The March of Dimes is the leading nonprofit organization for pregnancy and baby health. With chapters nationwide and its premier event, March for Babies[®], the March of Dimes works to improve the health of babies by preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality. For the latest resources and information, visit **marchofdimes.com** or **nacersano.org**.

NCHPEG promotes health professional education and information about advances in human genetics to improve health care by, integrating genetics into the knowledge base of health professionals and students of the health professions, developing educational tools and information resources to integrate genetics into health professional practice, and strengthening and expanding the interdisciplinary community of organizations and individuals committed to coordinated genetics education for health professionals.

Guided by the needs of their patients and their families, Massachusetts General Hospital aims to deliver the very best health care in a safe, compassionate environment; to advance that

care through innovative research and education; and to improve the health and well-being of the diverse communities it serves.

Genetic Alliance transforms health through genetics, promoting an environment of openness centered on the health of individuals, families, and communities. Genetic Alliance brings together diverse stakeholders that create novel partnerships in advocacy; integrates individual, family, and community perspectives to improve health systems; and revolutionizes access to information to enable translation of research into services and individualized decision making. For more information about Genetic Alliance, visit <http://www.geneticalliance.org>.