March 23, 2010

University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) physician Mona Fouad, M.D., will appear with John Ruffin, M.D., director of the National Center for Minority Health and Health Disparities (NCMHD), in Washington, D.C., at noon Thursday, March 25 to promote increased minority recruitment and retention in cancer clinical trials.

Fouad, director of the UAB Division of Preventive Medicine, the UAB Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Center (MHRC) and the Cancer Center's Cancer Control and Population Science Program, is a co-investigator on the grant Ruffin will be highlighting, Enhancing Minority Participation in Clinical Trials (EMPaCT).

The EMPaCT initiative is part of a $3.8 million grant by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) led by the University of Minnesota in partnership with UAB, University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, University of California-Davis and Johns Hopkins University.

Fouad and other principal investigators in attendance will address the research project's main goals and outcomes.

Fouad said although the nation's overall minority population is growing, less than 3 percent of all adults diagnosed with cancer or other chronic diseases are enrolled in clinical trials, and only 10 percent of that are minorities. This is troubling, she added, because racial and ethnic

minorities suffer more from cancer than the U.S. population as a whole and develop certain types of cancer more often with a greater chance of premature death due to late-stage detection.

"Much is known about disease-incidence rates in minority populations, but little research exists to understand barriers and biases that limit participation and access to clinical trials," she said.

Through EMPaCT, a number of initiatives will be used to help increase minority recruitment and retention into clinical trials: develop a regional consortia and network of individual institutions and centers to enhance minority participation in clinical trials; develop community-based participatory research and education programs to combat the underlying mistrust of the medical research community; enable EMPaCT-participating institutions to enhance minority participation in clinical trials by implementing models shown to link investigators more successfully with their target communities; and provide the environment for conducting clinical research for minority-related diseases.

The result will be a step toward increasing minority participation in clinical trials nationally and developing credible models for recruiting minorities to cancer-specific trials.

"We must find ways to increase minority participation in clinical trials," Fouad said. "Failure to do so misses the opportunity to provide effective, detailed and often improved care for all persons via clinical trials. Focusing on recruiting minorities into clinical trials also provides a novel

mechanism to engage the part of our nation at the greatest medical risk, those on the fringe of the health-care safety net and for whom data is persistently limited and/or missing in the areas of chronic diseases and cancer."

The UAB Division of Preventive Medicine is dedicated to medicine and the health of the public through research, teaching and dissemination and translation of knowledge for improved health outcomes. Special concern for health disparities and a desire to promote women's health guide many division activities.

The UAB Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center (MHRC) is a comprehensive educational, research and community outreach center focused on eliminating the health disparities of racial/ethnic minorities and under-served populations.