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Residents of Bay County, Fla., and surrounding communities will have access to the advanced care of the University of Alabama at Birmingham Cancer Care Network now that Gulf Coast Medical Center in Panama City has joined as its first Florida affiliate.

The UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center and UAB Medicine developed the UAB Cancer Care Network to provide community health-care providers access to exceptional cancer research and enable patients to receive care close to home. Launched in June 2011 with four affiliates, the network links the UAB Cancer Center with community cancer centers and hospitals in Alabama, Georgia and now Florida.

“We are excited to have the opportunity to work with the Gulf Coast Medical Center and join forces with affiliates to multiply the power of cancer research and deliver premium care where it is most needed,” says Edward Partridge, M.D., director of the UAB Cancer Center and president of the American Cancer Society Inc. “UAB’s 350 cancer scientists and clinicians make discoveries every day, and the UAB Cancer Care Network can offer improved access to those discoveries, ultimately saving more lives.”

UAB is home to Alabama’s only National Cancer Institute-designated comprehensive cancer center and the only one in a six-state region; its Cancer Center treats an estimated 5,000 new patients annually and is committed to providing the highest quality of life for people diagnosed with cancer, says Partridge.

The UAB Cancer Center works closely with each network affiliate to provide local access to best practices in cancer care, leading-edge clinical trials and support services, physician and nursing education and research expertise and resources.

Gulf Coast Medical Center, a 176-bed acute care hospital and a member of the Hospital Corporation of America family, also is a recipient of the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer Outstanding Achievement Award.

The other four UAB Cancer Care Network affiliates are the Medical Center of Central Georgia in Macon, Ga., Southeast Alabama Medical Center in Dothan, Ala., Northeast Alabama Regional Medical Center in Anniston, Ala., and Russell Medical Center in Alexander City, Ala.

The UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center is among the 40 cancer centers in the nation to meet the stringent criteria for the National Cancer Institute's comprehensive designation. The center is a leader in groundbreaking research, reducing cancer disparities and leading-edge patient care.

The UAB Health System includes all of the University of Alabama at Birmingham's patient-care activities, including UAB Hospital, the Callahan Eye Foundation Hospital and The Kirklin Clinic. UAB is an internationally renowned research university and academic health center; its professional schools and specialty patient-care programs are consistently ranked among the nation's top 50. UAB Hospital is one of the 10 largest in the United States.