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Community and Health Care Leaders Convene to Drive Policy Change and Improve Current State of Children’s Behavioral Health Services

Greater Rochester Health Foundation Announces the Formation of the Commission on Children’s Behavioral Health in the Finger Lakes

ROCHESTER, N.Y., April 9, 2015 – Greater Rochester Health Foundation announced the formation of the Commission on Children’s Behavioral Health in the Finger Lakes during a press conference earlier this morning. The commission is working toward creating and presenting a report in November which will outline recommended policy, practice, and funding changes to improve the state of children’s behavioral health services in the nine-county region served by the Greater Rochester Health Foundation. The commission’s first meeting will take place later this evening.

“The Health Foundation convened this commission based on consistent input we had received from childcare providers, schools, pediatricians, and children’s mental health clinicians, all of whom expressed concern about the region’s children’s behavioral health system, its capacity, and in some cases, its quality,” said John Urban, president and CEO, Greater Rochester Health Foundation. “The group we’ve called upon to support this effort is diverse, action-oriented, and determined to see the necessary policy, practice, and funding changes happen.”

Sandy Parker and Tom Richards are commission co-chairs, Mike Scharf, M.D., URMC, is serving as the commission’s project lead, and Bonnie DeVinney is the commission consultant. The commission consists of a multi-disciplinary group of experienced and respected community and health care leaders and stakeholders including schools, healthcare, government, and criminal justice.

“We’re bringing together diverse experts and stakeholders who will speak with a unified voice to create children’s behavioral health issue awareness among lawmakers,” said Tom Richards, co-chair of the commission. “We are focused on identifying what reforms need to happen so we can improve the health of the children in our region.”

The commission is working within an ambitious and aggressive timeline to ensure the report is complete in the upcoming months.

“By releasing recommended policy changes, and clearly defining the rationale for these reforms, we hope to give the legislature what they need to drive these changes forward,” said Sandy Parker, commission co-chair.

As the commission project lead, Michael Scharf, M.D., and his team bring an experienced clinical voice. “One in five children lives with serious behavioral and mental health conditions,” said Scharf. “Behavioral and mental illness causes an incredible amount of suffering on kids and families and can sometimes have deadly consequences. Most people have some awareness of this issue, but do not necessarily know of resources available to them. It’s time for our region to come up with a thoughtful, community-wide response to improve the health of youth and families.”

About Greater Rochester Health Foundation:

The mission of Greater Rochester Health Foundation is to improve the health status of residents of the Greater Rochester community, including people whose unique health care needs have not been met because of race, ethnicity, or income. For more information, please visit www.thegrhf.org.

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