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**Nurse Practitioner Healthcare Foundation Fellows Have an Impact on Public Health and Health Policy**  
*Nurse Practitioners at the Office of the Surgeon General Address Obesity and Health Communication*

Bellevue, WA, (July 8, 2008) – At a time when questions surround the U.S. health care system, two Nurse Practitioner Healthcare Foundation (NPHF) Senior Health Fellows are working to influence U.S. health policy. Mary Beth Bigley, DrPH, MSN, ANP, and Catherine Wisner, PhD, FNP, nurse practitioners (NPs) and recipients of the NPHF's Health Fellowship grants, are completing their second year in the Office of the Surgeon General (OSG), helping to provide the best evidence-based science as a reference for public health programs.

“These fellows have demonstrated the importance of bringing the nursing perspective to the forefront of public health discussions,” says Acting Surgeon General Steven K. Galson, MD, MPH, a rear admiral in the U.S. Public Health Service.

As the first-ever nurse practitioner fellows in the OSG, Bigley and Wisner have provided leadership in critical areas of public health. “Our holistic view of health care – acknowledging the importance of prevention and social issues in addition to clinical interventions – make us especially effective health care providers,” says Wisner.

**Addressing Obesity**

Preventing childhood obesity is a top priority for the OSG and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Bigley serves as a key leader for the *Healthy Youth for a Healthy Future* initiative which HHS launched in November 2007 to bring attention to the nearly 34 percent of children and teens in America who are either overweight or at risk of becoming overweight. Bigley also helps coordinate the Surgeon General's HHS interagency council to improve current childhood obesity programs and campaigns, including the design and implementation of the *Healthy Youth for a Healthy Future* Web page and outreach tour.

As part of this program, the Acting Surgeon General is conducting a nationwide outreach tour, recognizing city officials and local organizations that are taking aggressive action to end childhood obesity. “Overweight children have a higher risk of being overweight adults, and face the possibility of serious and chronic health problems,” says Galson. “It's an important public health issue, and prevention is vital.”

**Building Health Communication and Health Literacy**

In addition to addressing specific public health issues like childhood obesity, Bigley and Wisner are focusing on expanding health communication, recognizing it as a challenge and an opportunity to incorporate the nursing point of view.

“The overarching issues affecting public health today are prevention, quality of care and access,” says Bigley. “All clinicians and health care systems need to communicate more efficiently and effectively to achieve positive health outcomes and understand the importance and value of health information technology.”

In collaboration with the HHS Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, the OSG published proceedings of *The Surgeon General's Workshop on Improving Health Literacy*. Wisner is working to improve the delivery of care to underserved populations living with HIV/AIDS using principles from the workshop. As a provider at Whitman Walker HIV/AIDS Clinic in northwest Washington, DC, Wisner sees firsthand the challenges of HIV/AIDS treatment when low health literacy is prevalent among patients.

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“Improving health literacy will make it more likely that patients understand their conditions and treatment regimens, and can maintain and improve their health status,” says Wisner. Using current technology such as electronic health records and Internet tools, Wisner hopes to improve health literacy among providers and patients.

Separately, Bigley developed and executed the 2006 and 2007 marketing and communication plans for the *Surgeon General’s Family Health History Initiative*, a prevention-focused program that encourages family members to learn about health risks based on family history. Bigley finds that her nursing approach enables her to frame issues in the context of health promotion and disease prevention rather than focusing on the illness.

After completing their fellowships this year, Wisner and Bigley plan to work in collaboration with the NPHF to help NPs become proactive about public health issues and more effective in influencing policy on the local, state and federal levels. For the NPHF, this Health Fellowship has created an opportunity for nursing to influence public health policy, and improve health communication and literacy. The NPHF is grateful for the generous support for the Health Fellowship program in the Office of the Surgeon General. The program is provided through grants from AstraZeneca, Takeda Pharmaceuticals of North America, NovoNordisk and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

### ***The Nurse Practitioner Healthcare Foundation***

*In 2005, a group of pioneering nurse practitioners launched the Nurse Practitioner Healthcare Foundation. The foundation is dedicated to raising the bar in health care, contributing to excellence in care and bringing NPs to the forefront of the larger health care arena. The NPHF works on behalf of the entire nurse practitioner profession to make high-quality, effective care accessible through research, education, health policy, service and philanthropy. The Nurse Practitioner Healthcare Foundation is an IRS 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Visit <http://www.nphealthcarefoundation.org> for more information and for a listing of current opportunities.*

### ***The Office of the Surgeon General***

*The Surgeon General serves as America's chief health educator by providing Americans the best scientific information available on how to improve their health and reduce the risk of illness and injury. The surgeon general is appointed by the president with the advice and consent of the Senate for a 4-year term of office. The Office is part of the Office of Public Health and Science in the Office of the Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The OSG takes on the role of analyzing major public health issues, and the science derived from the research informs health policy makers. To learn more about current initiatives visit <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/>.*

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