

For Immediate Release

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University Physicians Healthcare Honors Graduates of Pilot Employment Program for Young Adults with Disabilities

TUCSON, Ariz. (June 9, 2010) – University Physicians Healthcare will honor six young adults as they complete the pilot year of the UPH Hospital Young Adult Project SEARCH Program. The pilot program is a variation of the Project SEARCH High School Transition Program, a nationally recognized one-year education-to-employment training program for students with disabilities in their final year of high school. These young adults, interns, will graduate from the program in a ceremony, June 11, 2010 at UPH Hospital.

The Project SEARCH Arizona program was implemented in August 2009 at UPH Hospital in partnership with the Sonoran University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities and other community agencies. The six interns participated in a daily schedule beginning with one hour of classroom instruction followed by five hours of work experience in a rotation within various departments at UPH Hospital. Interns had the opportunity to work in health information management, materials management, dietary services, environmental services, physical therapy, respiratory therapy and other UPH Hospital departments.

“We’re excited to participate in this vital program,” said Larry Aldrich, president and chief executive officer of University Physicians Healthcare. “We are honored to be able to help these students bridge the gap between school and real-world work. They are now better able to enter the workforce with real work experience they gained at UPH Hospital.”

One of the graduating interns, Caesar Plascencia, was offered a part-time job in environmental services at UPH’s corporate offices. “I liked working in the maintenance department. It taught me a lot of skills I can use at home,” said Plascencia. “The biggest change is that now I know what I want to do with my life. I want to go to college and study physical therapy.” His first rotation was in physical therapy where he assisted therapists with equipment, prepped tables between patients, stocked packs for hot and cold preparations, and confirmed patient appointments by phone.

Next month, a second cohort of young adults will enter the program. And, in August 2010, UPH Project SEARCH expands with the opening of a High School Program that will

initially serve 13 incoming students. “It is very rewarding to have Project SEARCH at our hospital,” said Terry Cassange-Dobell, Project SEARCH coordinator at University Physicians Healthcare. “It is one more way that UPH fulfills its mission of caring for our community.”

The Project SEARCH program was developed at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center and is now active in over 140 sites spanning 31 states and 3 countries. The program targets students and adults with significant barriers to employment who are committed to finding employment in the community. Nationally, 75% of the Project SEARCH interns who have completed the program have obtained competitive employment.

Project SEARCH Arizona, an initiative led by the Sonoran UCEDD to replicate the innovative Project SEARCH employment training model in Tucson and across the state, is a community partnership among the following organizations: Arizona Department of Economic Security, Division of Developmental Disabilities and Rehabilitation Services Administration; Tucson Unified School District; Pima County Joint Technology Education District; Blake/Easter Seals Foundation; Linkages Arizona; DIRECT Center for Independent Living, Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, and University Physicians Healthcare.

The Sonoran UCEDD, housed at the UA College of Medicine, envisions Arizona as a community benefiting from the full participation of all members, with recognition of the strengths brought by diversity in abilities, culture, age, interests and life experience. Its mission is to ensure full community participation by individuals with developmental disabilities through its interdisciplinary training program, technical assistance, exemplary services and model programs.

UPH is a nonprofit corporation created in 1985 as the medical practice of the physicians of the UA College of Medicine. Together, UPH, The University of Arizona, UPH Hospital and University Medical Center combine to care for patients, educate medical students, train young physicians and conduct clinical research. With over 400 physicians and 2000 staff, UPH is Arizona’s largest physicians group.

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