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For More Information: Info@SmarterStory.com or Stan Smith (954) 762-7000

Joseph H. Kanter Family Foundation Convenes Historic Learning Health System Summit; Stakeholders Collaboratively Work Toward Realizing a National-Scale Learning Health System

Washington, D.C. – The Joseph H. Kanter Family Foundation (KFF) convened a two-day Learning Health System (LHS) Summit on May 17 and 18 where over 80 prominent individuals representing organizations and stakeholders across the health care and health IT communities gathered at The National Press Club in Washington, D.C. Participants worked together to begin laying key foundational elements that promise to harmonize and coalesce cutting-edge work presently underway into a national-scale LHS.

A multi-stakeholder, 16-member Planning Committee, including two former United States National Coordinators for Health Information Technology (Dr. David Blumenthal who served under a Democratic administration and Dr. Robert Kolodner who served under a Republican administration), has been working for the past half-year to plan the Summit. The Planning Committee played an instrumental role in identifying participants to be invited and organizations to be represented at this limited-capacity, invitation-only Summit.

Utilizing a definition developed by the Institute of Medicine (IOM), a “Learning Health System” is defined as “one in which progress in science, informatics, and care culture align to generate new knowledge as an ongoing, natural by-product of the care experience, and seamlessly refine and deliver best practices for continuous improvement in health and health care.” Achievement of a national-scale LHS will improve health care quality by streamlining research, by supporting public health, by advancing patient safety, and by empowering clinicians and patients alike to make better-informed health decisions through enabling investigators to study what works best for every disease for every patient. Through a learning system, new biomedical knowledge will find its way very quickly into health care.

Participants in the two-day Summit began working toward achieving multi-stakeholder consensus on a set of principles that would underlie the development of a national-scale LHS benefiting stakeholders across the health care spectrum. In certain respects, the Summit was modeled after the 1944 Dumbarton Oaks Conference where a critical mass of key world leaders convened to achieve consensus around principles that ultimately served as the foundation upon which the United Nations was built; the Summit aspires to be to the creation a national-scale LHS what the Dumbarton Oaks Conference was to the founding of the United Nations.

KFF Chairman Joe Kanter framed the two-day summit by asking two critical questions of all participants: 1.) What can a Learning Health System do for you?

And 2.) What can you do for a Learning Health System?

“KFF sponsored the Summit because our nation’s health care system is facing a grave crisis and the time for action is now,” said health care pioneer and prostate cancer survivor Joe Kanter, who is the namesake of the foundation. “A special kind of leadership is required to foster an environment where stakeholders can work together to harmonize and synergize efforts currently underway to collectively build a national-scale LHS. Such leadership must facilitate the development of a national-scale LHS not by controlling, but by stimulating creativity and innovation, as well as providing simple and trustworthy governance.” Paying tribute to the Summit’s historical significance, Kanter concluded, “The efforts of Summit participants collectively represent one of our nation’s great feats in health care by engaging such an impressive and diverse group working together in a collaborative and bi-partisan manner to give the gift of health to our children and our nation.”

“I am struck that we may have started something transcendent. I do not believe that, in the history of health in the United States, a multi-stakeholder group like this has ever gathered around an issue of such importance and common interest,” said Dr. Charles Friedman, director of the Health Informatics program at the University of Michigan, who chaired the Planning Committee

The Summit generated significant enthusiasm. Recognizing the urgency of harnessing this momentum, KFF Executive Director Josh Rubin stated that, “Key next steps include continuing the consensus process around the principles and working to create a Learning Health Community. This community will develop bottom-up as a coalition of the willing. Its collaborative work ultimately aims to spawn a series of activities catalyzing the rapid development of a national-scale LHS that promises to empower individuals to transform health care and health.”

Summit participants represented organizations and stakeholder groups including: patient advocacy and consumer organizations, provider organizations, research organizations, government agencies, payers, clinicians, the pharmaceutical industry, health IT vendors, philanthropic organizations, professional associations, research initiatives and organizations, and thought leaders. For a complete list of participating individuals and the organizations they respectively represented, please see <http://kanterhealth.org/featured/2012-summit/>.

Joseph H. Kanter Family Foundation: <http://kanterhealth.org>

The Joseph H. Kanter Family Foundation and Health Legacy Partnership, a non-profit organization based in Washington D.C., aims to effectuate a health system that leverages the power of health information technology (HIT) and electronic health records (EHRs) to learn from real-world patient experiences by putting patients at its center.

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