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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MMCRI receives funding to study impact of opioid prescribing laws

\$339,000 grant from the National Institutes of Health will support public health initiatives to fight the opioid crisis in rural New England

PORTLAND, Maine – The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has awarded Maine Medical Center’s research institute and its partnering institution, the University of Vermont (UVM), a \$339,000 grant to study the impact that stricter opioid prescribing laws have had on population health in northern New England. The research will be done through the Northern New England Clinical and Translational Research Network (NNE-CTR), comprised of researchers from the Maine Medical Center Research Institute (MMCRI) and UVM, and funded by the NIH.

In 2016, Maine and Vermont responded to the opioid crisis with legislation instituting stricter opioid prescribing guidelines and requirements for prescription drug monitoring programs. The goal was to reduce access to prescription opioids and make it more difficult for patients to obtain prescriptions from multiple providers. Investigators Kathleen Fairfield, M.D., Dr.PH, of MMCRI and the Department of Medicine at Maine Medical Center, and Valerie Harder, Ph.D., M.H.S., and Timothy Plante, M.D., M.H.S., of UVM will analyze whether that legislation has successfully led to a decrease in opioid-related overdoses, hospitalizations and other medical events and whether there were unintended consequences, such as patients suffering from substance use disorders turning instead to the illegal use of heroin. The team also will analyze whether outcomes are different for various patient demographics, such as whether they live in a rural or urban area.

“This research provides us the opportunity to study the impact of state laws regarding opioid prescribing while engaging with a wide variety of community members in real time,” said Dr. Fairfield. “We hope

this work will help inform clinical care of patients, community-based interventions, future policy changes and additional research.”

The NIH awarded MMC and UVM a \$20 million research grant in 2017 to establish the NNE-CTR, a regional network that would help researchers develop and implement innovative medical treatments for many chronic diseases prevalent in our region including cancer, heart disease, obesity, diabetes, Alzheimer’s disease and substance abuse. Research activities also focus on defining optimal methods of prevention and health care delivery in rural environments, where approximately 60 percent of Maine’s population resides. This grant provides additional funds for the NNE-CTR to focus specifically on the impact of the opioid crisis on this community.

“There is confidence the program will provide options and opportunities for development of a blueprint to address opioid overdose, with the potential to have a powerful influence on addressing addiction in northern New England,” said Clifford Rosen, M.D., Director of the Center for Clinical and Translational Research at MMCRI and Principal Investigator, NNE-CTR. “The \$339,000 grant leverages the research infrastructure of the NNE-CTR and will reinforce its reach in a high-priority medical challenge for our region and beyond.”

“A decisive strength of the program is our collaboration with colleagues at the Maine Medical Center Research Institute,” said Gary Stein, Ph.D., Principal Investigator, NNE-CTR and Director of the University of Vermont Cancer Center. “This new initiative launched on September 1. The complementary institutional expertise will have an impact locally, regionally and beyond.”

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About Maine Medical Center

Maine Medical Center (MMC), recognized as a Best Regional Hospital by U.S. News and World Report for 2018-2019, is a complete health care resource for the people of Greater Portland and the entire state, as well as northern New England. Incorporated in 1868, MMC is the state’s largest medical center, licensed for 637 beds and employing nearly 8,700 people. MMC’s unique role as both a community hospital and a referral center requires an unparalleled depth and breadth of services, including an active educational program and a world-class biomedical research center. As a nonprofit institution, Maine Medical Center provides nearly 23 percent of all the charity care delivered in Maine. MMC is a member of the MaineHealth system, a growing family of health care services in northern New England. For more information, visit www.mmc.org.

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