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**REGIONAL HEALTHCARE LEADERS GATHER TO ADDRESSES CHANGES
IN THE INDUSTRY AND TO DEVELOP PLANS FOR THE FUTURE**

Bellingham, WA, May 31, 2012 –An aging population and workforce -- coupled with political, cultural and economic changes -- challenge regional healthcare, education and workforce professionals to proactively plan for the future. With that in mind, more than 80 regional leaders attended the May 23 Healthcare Leadership Workforce Summit held at Whatcom Community College. Participants included providers who care for patients, administrators responsible for providing the care environment, workforce development leaders, and educators who prepare students to succeed in this rapidly transforming industry. The summit laid a foundation for strategic and tactical work to adequately prepare and shape Northwest Washington’s healthcare workforce.

“As educational institutions, we recognize our responsibility to provide relevant, quality training for students pursuing a degree or certificate in the healthcare field,” says WCC President Kathi Hiyane-Brown. “We consistently work with our regional partners to prepare for changing skill requirements and to graduate students who are prepared to succeed in this rapidly changing field. The Healthcare Leadership Workforce Summit is a vivid example of our partnership.”

In addition to Whatcom, event sponsors included PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center, Northwest Workforce Council, Whatcom Alliance for Healthcare Access (WAHA), Bellingham Technical College, The Center of Excellence for Allied Health, SEIU Healthcare 1199 NW Multi-employer Training and Education Fund, Skagit Valley College and Western Washington University. Funds for the summit were partially provided by local recipients of a Washington State Hospital Employee Education & Training grant as well as the Center of Excellence for Allied Health and PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center.

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During morning key-note presentations and at afternoon panel and small group discussions, conference participants explored changes that will influence healthcare in the coming years. In addition to America's aging population and workforce -- and the associated demand for Medicare and Medicaid -- challenges include uncertainty in the regulatory and legislative arenas especially regarding the national Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act; growth of technology in healthcare; the role of home care and the family as components of the healthcare system; and a changing health paradigm from care of the acutely ill to preventive and non-institutionalized care.

"At PeaceHealth we are preparing for a future where our providers will be reimbursed for keeping a population healthy, as well as treating their acute illness," says PeaceHealth CEO Nancy Steiger. "To do this well we need strong community partnerships with other providers, social service organizations, and educational institutes."

Keynote speaker Michael Hubble reinforced the growing role of 'whole health.' The importance of wellness and improving the population's overall health was also discussed during the summit's roundtables. Hubble is a senior director for the Advisory Board Company, a for-profit, publicly traded research firm serving more than 2,600 of America's leading hospitals and health systems. He shared the firm's findings on strategic clinical practices. The conference's keynote speakers also included Susan Skillman, deputy director of the WWAMI Rural Health Research Center and the UW Center for Health Workforce Studies, and Claire McCarthy, Epic Organizational Readiness System Director, Providence Health and Services.

In her address, Skillman shared that Washington state's population is expected to grow 26 percent or 1.7 million people by 2030. Of those 1.7 million people, one in five will be age 65 or older. This aging population will not only place demands on Medicare and Medicaid, it also means providers will see increasing rates of chronic disease. Skillman added the current average age of Registered Nurses in the state is between 55 and 59, indicating a pending shortage in trained nurses. The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts by 2027, 90,000 RNs will be needed in Washington. Currently, approximately 46,300 are employed. In addition, analysts forecast a possible shortage of Home Care Aides of between 30,000 to 50,000 workers by 2030.

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Not only are healthcare workers in demand, the skills required are different than in years past. Change expert McCarthy reinforced today's healthcare professionals must have training in change management, human resources, project and risk management, continuous quality improvement and Lean principles. Because of the growing importance of technology, they must also be highly adept in the use of technological applications and equipment. In addition to being skilled and adaptable to emerging technology, workers should be able to think critically to understand data and trends.

"We heard from several speakers and participants it's critical to have effective team participation up and down the hierarchy and across professions," says Gary Smith of the Northwest Workforce Council. "Working together as a team is essential to be able to analyze and take action on the data. Critical thinking and problem resolution are among the skills workers entering the field will need."

Panelists from the session on *Bridging the Divide: Moving from Silos to Systems* led by WAHA Executive Director Larry Thompson confirmed that in addition to specialty training for RNs, regional colleges and universities will need to consider how they can provide training to address emerging fields and issues such as:

- coaching occupations to help people navigate the complexities of the healthcare system and manage their preventive health plans;
- growth in mid-level professional occupations (e.g. nurse practitioners, physician assistants) as demand outstrips physicians' capacity;
- behavioral health emerging as a major concern;
- consumer demand for tools (e-visits), access (records) and information to manage their own healthcare;
- Health Informatics, which includes not only the gathering of data but its astute interpretation to assist both patients and caregivers.

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Organizers will evaluate summit results and determine the need for future meetings.

Whatcom Community College is an accredited, comprehensive two-year college with a committed, accomplished faculty and staff who serve more than 7,800 students quarterly. On its beautiful 71 acre campus in Bellingham WA, and through on-line courses, Whatcom offers transfer degrees, professional and technical training programs, as well as basic education, job skills and enrichment classes. For more information about WCC, please contact the Public Information office at 360.383.3310 or visit www.whatcom.ctc.edu.

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Note to editor: Summit organizers are available for interviews as well as to write editorial columns for publication.