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Nearly 100 Health Care Professionals Attend Gang Awareness Workshop

Lincoln, R.I. – June 24, 2009 – Health care professionals from hospitals throughout Rhode Island participated in a gang awareness workshop today. Attendees received important information that will help them better identify gang members and take the appropriate precautions to ensure a safe health care environment is maintained. The workshop was hosted by The Center for Health Professions, in collaboration with the Rhode Island Gang Taskforce.

It was once thought that gangs only convened in selected areas, which left hospitals as “neutral” territory. In recent years, this has proven to be a fallacy. Hospitals nationwide are reporting an increase in the number of gang members turning to them for treatment. As a result, it has forced some emergency departments to reevaluate the way they triage and subsequently treat patients.

No community is immune to gang violence. Healthcare workers may be placed in vulnerable situations when dealing with gang members and their associates. Understanding how to recognize potential offenders’ cues, knowing when to notify security and law enforcement and taking the appropriate precautions may be the most effective ways to maintain a safe health care environment.

Attendees learned how to:

- Recognize the statewide problem of gang activity in Rhode Island
- Identify different gang affiliations, signs, markings and language
- Assess their organization’s preparedness
- Identify resources and strategies to stem the flow of community violence into hospitals

“The Center for Health Professions is pleased to host this important professional development event,” said Ruth Ricciarelli, executive director, The Center for Health Professions. “We are happy to be partnering with our law enforcement community to provide participants with information, resources and strategies that will help them to improve patient care and maintain safety.”

“As prosecutors who have worked on literally dozens of gang-related crime cases all over Rhode Island with the workshop’s speakers, we know first-hand that a gang member’s affiliation with his gang doesn’t just stop simply because he walks into an ER for treatment or to check on somebody who’s been hurt,” said Attorney General Patrick C. Lynch. “By collaborating with the health-care professionals who in many instances of gang violence are the first responders, we may be able to prevent future acts of violence whose victims could be the caregivers themselves. For this reason alone, I congratulate the Hospital Association of Rhode Island’s Center for Health Profession for this very smart and worthwhile initiative.”

“The Rhode Island State Police is pleased to partner with our state’s health care community to further public safety,” said Major Stephen Bannon, Rhode Island State Police. “It is through partnerships like this that we are able to educate Rhode Islanders on appropriate precautions and effective strategies that foster health and safety.”

Speakers included: Ruth Ricciarelli, executive director, The Center for Health Professions; Maj. Stephen Bannon, Rhode Island State Police; Det. Peter Chabot, Rhode Island State Police Gang Unit; Sgt. Michael Wheeler, Providence Police Department Gang Unit; Chief Anthony Silva, executive director, Rhode Island Police Training Academy.

Founded over a half century ago, the Hospital Association of Rhode Island is a statewide trade organization that assists member hospitals in effectively meeting the health care needs of Rhode Island, through advocacy, representation, education and services. HARI members work collaboratively to improve the quality of care delivered and address issues threatening access to health care including increasing health costs, workforce shortages and decreasing reimbursement. HARI members work together to ensure that all Rhode Islanders will receive comprehensive, high quality health care.

Established in 1998, the Health Partnership Council (HPC), which operates under the auspices of the Hospital Association of Rhode Island, is a coalition of healthcare providers, labor, healthcare professional organizations, postsecondary institutions, policy makers and other stakeholders. The Center for Health Professions was launched in 2007 by the Health Partnership Council to promote quality healthcare for individuals who live, work and seek care in Rhode Island by advancing workforce development initiatives designed to grow and enhance the state's professional healthcare workforce.

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