Pitt, UPMC Form New Asthma Institute to Increase Research and Enhance Care

PITTSBURGH, Aug. 17, 2009 – Leading pulmonary researchers and clinicians have established the University of Pittsburgh Asthma Institute at UPMC and the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Medicine, a comprehensive program dedicated to improving the lives of children and adults with asthma. The Institute combines cutting edge research programs with state-of-the-art clinical care.

Nearly 10 percent of the U.S. population suffers from asthma, making it one of the most common chronic diseases in both children and adults. Asthma attacks are responsible for over one million visits to the emergency room and 500,000 hospitalizations per year. While many patients are able to control their symptoms through medication, as many as 20 percent of asthma patients don’t experience relief from symptoms with current medications.

“Despite how common asthma is, it remains poorly understood and, in many cases, poorly treated,” said Sally Wenzel, M.D., director of the Institute. “Ideally, this Institute will help us increase our scientific understanding of asthma and other allergic diseases and enable us to translate our findings into new and innovative treatments for patients.”

In addition, the Institute will engage the medical and general community to increase awareness of asthma, improve general knowledge and help to empower health care providers and patients to better address the disease. Finally, the Institute will serve as a bridge between the pediatric and adult asthma communities to improve communication and care among patients and providers.

Patients who come to the Institute will undergo extensive evaluations, including a comprehensive history with a focus on identifying the environmental, hormonal and infectious factors in their illness. Patients will be routinely evaluated for inflammation of the lungs and, in some cases, have lung biopsies to examine the tissue more closely. The Institute works in conjunction with specialists from UPMC and the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. Clinical programs in the Institute will be managed by the Comprehensive Lung Center and Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC.

“Patients will have access to our most advanced diagnostic technologies and treatments, as well as the opportunity to participate in our wide variety of clinical trials. We believe this institute will help
patients live more healthfully and fully, while allowing researchers to understand what is happening with the disease at a biological level,” said Dr. Wenzel.

About UPMC
UPMC is an $8 billion integrated global health enterprise headquartered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and one of the leading nonprofit health systems in the United States. As western Pennsylvania’s largest employer, with 50,000 employees, UPMC is transforming the economy of the region into one based on medicine, research and technology. By integrating 20 hospitals, 400 doctors’ offices and outpatient sites, long-term care facilities and a major health insurance services division, and in collaboration with its academic partner, the University of Pittsburgh Schools of the Health Sciences, UPMC has advanced the quality and efficiency of health care and developed internationally renowned programs in transplantation, cancer, neurosurgery, psychiatry, orthopedics and sports medicine, among others. UPMC is commercializing its medical and technological expertise by nurturing new companies, developing strategic business relationships with some of the world’s leading multinational corporations and expanding into international markets, including Italy, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Cyprus and Qatar. For more information about UPMC, visit our Web site at www.upmc.com.

About the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine
As one of the nation’s leading academic centers for biomedical research, the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine integrates advanced technology with basic science across a broad range of disciplines in a continuous quest to harness the power of new knowledge and improve the human condition. Driven mainly by the School of Medicine and its affiliates, Pitt has ranked among the top 10 recipients of funding from the National Institutes of Health since 1997 and now ranks fifth in the nation, according to preliminary data for fiscal year 2008. Likewise, the School of Medicine is equally committed to advancing the quality and strength of its medical and graduate education programs, for which it is recognized as an innovative leader, and to training highly skilled, compassionate clinicians and creative scientists well-equipped to engage in world-class research. The School of Medicine is the academic partner of UPMC, which has collaborated with the University to raise the standard of medical excellence in Pittsburgh and to position health care as a driving force behind the region’s economy. For more information about the School of Medicine, see www.medschool.pitt.edu.