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## **RURAL MARYLAND HOSPITALS FORM UNPRECEDENTED COLLABORATIVE TO IMPROVE PATIENT CARE**

***CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, Innovative eICU® Program Unites Hospitals to Reduce Critical Care Physician Shortage, Improve Care with VISICU Technology***

WASHINGTON DC – Today, six hospitals serving patients in rural Maryland announced plans to improve the quality of patient care by implementing the VISICU eICU® Program in each of their intensive care units. Made possible by a \$3 million grant from CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield (CareFirst), the eICU® Program marries medicine and technology to bring critical care physicians, also known as intensivists, to areas facing a shortage in this specialty.

“This technology means that patients in under-served communities will still be able to access intensive care services in their local hospitals,” said Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD, District 5), Majority Leader of the U.S. House of Representatives. “I welcome the contributions that Maryland eCare will make in the communities of the 5<sup>th</sup> District and throughout the state of Maryland and laud this new collaborative for taking this innovative approach to patient care.”

Studies have shown improved patient outcomes and decreased lengths of stay for patients in intensive care units (ICU) managed by critical care physicians. Yet many hospitals – especially those in rural America – do not have the resources to keep these kinds of physicians on site 24 hours a day.

The six hospitals, known collectively as Maryland eCare, united two years ago to find a solution to the critical care physician shortage. It is the largest collaboration of independent hospitals in the country – and the only such partnership in the state of Maryland – to establish this model of care for its patients.

“Bringing this technology to rural Maryland means patients and families will have better care close to home,” said Dr. Marc T. Zubrow, Medical Director of Maryland eCare and Director of Critical Care Medicine at Christiana Care Health System (Wilmington, Del.) which houses its own eICU® Program. “This program enables us to act quickly and prevent complications. It leads to improved patient outcomes, getting patients home with their families more quickly and more safely.”

In the ICU, patient conditions can change very quickly. Complementing local ICU care, eICU critical care physicians and nurses – based at Christiana Care’s eICU monitoring center – closely watch patient conditions 24/7 remotely, through video and audio technology combined with intelligent monitoring and alarm systems. While maintaining patient privacy, the eICU’s remote center closely monitors patients for any physical change, immediately alerting local caregivers and recommending corrective action.

"In addition to patient care, safety and satisfaction, the eICU® Program provides ICU nurses with immediate access to a critical care physician during off hours," said Zubrow. "This reduces stress and improves nurse retention in this very intense environment. Also, it improves physician satisfaction and lifestyle as it allows for fewer sleep interruptions. Sleep deprived physicians tend to be more fatigued, less productive, and prone to errors."

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Made possible by a \$3 million grant from CareFirst, the Maryland eCare initiative uniquely brings together resources from insurers and rural hospitals. Independently, participating hospitals would not be able to bring this technology to their communities.

Chet Burrell, CareFirst President and CEO said, "CareFirst aims to serve as a catalyst for improving health care throughout the region we serve. Our support of the eICU initiative will foster better care at the most critical moments of recovery for CareFirst members and others who receive care in the participating hospitals."

Participating hospitals include Atlantic General Hospital, Berlin; Calvert Memorial Hospital, Prince Frederick; Civista Medical Center, LaPlata; Peninsula Regional Medical Center, Salisbury; St. Mary's Hospital, Leonardtown; and Washington County Health System, Hagerstown, which collectively admit more than 66,000 patients every year.

Maryland eCare's remote monitoring center will be based at Christiana Care Health System in Wilmington, Delaware. Christiana Care has expertise in utilizing this technology in its two hospitals with a total of four ICUs. In November 2005, Christiana Care was the first health system in the country to adapt the eICU® Program to monitor critically ill patients in its emergency departments and post anesthesia care units. Dr. Zubrow will oversee Maryland eCare's remote monitoring center with a team of Christiana Care critical care nurses and physicians.

The eICU® Program was developed by VISICU (a Philips Company; Baltimore, Md.) by two former Johns Hopkins critical care physicians and is being utilized in more than 200 hospitals across the country, primarily within large hospital systems.

*eICU® is a registered trademark of VISICU, Inc.*

### **About Maryland eCare**

Maryland eCare, LLC is a group of independent hospitals committed to improving patient care and safety for the communities they serve by sharing resources and bringing skilled critical care to rural Maryland.

### **About CareFirst**

In its 71st year of service, CareFirst, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, is a not-for-profit health care company which, through its affiliates and subsidiaries, offers a comprehensive portfolio of health insurance products and administrative services to more than 3.2 million individuals and groups in Maryland, Northern Virginia and the District of Columbia.

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