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NEWS RELEASE

October 23, 2006

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Health lecture speaker addresses empathy in health professions' students



Health professionals can be faced with tough ethical and moral decisions that impact patient's lives. Often times, the most common dilemmas are those involving patients who need additional care but their insurance won't pay for these services. Today, Dr. Donald Gabard, professor of physical therapy at Chapman University, led a presentation at California State University, Fresno on ethical and moral reasoning in health professional development.

His lecture, "Professional Education: The Cost to Care?" explored the importance for students to develop ethical and moral reasoning skills during professional education. Gabard discussed research findings that show that medical students often decline in their willingness to serve uninsured and underserved populations during the medical education process.

Health care professionals deal with an overwhelmed delivery system and a large portion of the nation's population who are uninsured.

"The health care outcomes for the uninsured are dismal partly due to the fact that they receive few screening/preventative measures and they are diagnosed after the illness had advanced, thus increasing mortality and disability," he explained.

Gabard, who teaches Health Care Administrative Ethics to students entering the clinical health practice, explained that there is a correlation between "empathy" and health care outcomes. "Practitioners who are empathetic with the patient take better intakes and thus have a larger picture of the patient and their problems. Patients feel more at ease with the practitioner who is "with them in the moment" and they are more compliant in following the practitioner's recommendations, [which produces] better outcomes."

Gabard's current research explores several health professions (physicians, pharmacists, veterinarians, and physical therapists) and the profession of law, to determine what happens to two primary characteristics among students in these professional programs. Gabard and a colleague are evaluating the attitudes and values of students in professional health programs to determine if their levels of "empathy" and willingness to serve low-income and uninsured individuals change.

Gabard is an experienced clinician who has practiced pediatric physical therapy in multiple settings including private practice, Pacific State Hospital, the University Affiliated Program at Children's Hospital of Los Angeles, Special Children's Center in Pasadena and California Children's Services. In his faculty role he teaches courses in physical therapy ethics, cultural diversity, administration and administrative ethics. Gabard has published several research articles and is co-author of the book, *Physical Therapy Ethics*.

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Gabard earned his Master's degree in physical therapy at the University of Southern California (USC) and completed an additional two-year program in interdisciplinary medicine at its University Affiliated Program. He then earned an M.P.A. and Ph.D. in Public Administration with an emphasis in administrative ethics from USC.

Today's lecture was sponsored by the College of Health and Human Services and is part of a monthly series that features leaders in health and human services research and education.

For more information contained in this release, please contact Brandie Campbell at: 559.278.7940 or visit the following Web site:

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