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2005 Meeting Report Magee Keynote Address Focuses on Family Caregivers

NEW YORK -- One of the biggest trends affecting health care in the United States and worldwide is the growing role of family caregivers, said Mike Magee, MD, Senior Fellow in the Humanities, World Medical Association; and Vice President, Pfizer Medical Humanities Initiative, during his keynote address at the Tenth Annual Meeting of the Global Alliance for Medical Education, held June 19-21 at the Westin New York at Times Square.

Driving that trend is the huge increase in the aging population. Fifty percent of 60-year-olds have a parent alive. "This means that the four-generation family in the United States is pushing out the three-generation family. The common family in the future will have a grandchild, a child, a parent, and a grandparent. Even more dramatic is the fact that by the year 2050, a million Americans will be over the age of 100. This means that the five-generation family will become commonplace in America," said Dr. Magee.

In America today, 25% of these four-generation families have an informal family caregiver; 85% of those are family members; almost all are third-generation women. These women, who are trying to manage caring for parent and grandparent, children and grandchildren, are becoming a knowledgeable and activist group of consumers in the U.S., Dr. Magee said.

The rise in family caregivers is one of the factors pushing a change in the healthcare delivery system's structure. "Just as power shifted from hospitals to outpatient settings, we are now seeing that power is shifting from the outpatient setting into the home," said Dr. Magee. "It is in the home that these informal caregiver workforces are growing day in and day out and are becoming increasingly formalized. They want to become part of the healthcare team." In recent years, physicians have moved from a paternalistic approach to a partnership model. Now, they must figure out how to make these informal caregivers part of the team, said Dr. Magee.

As for the impact of this trend on education, Dr. Magee said: "CME has a critical role to play in facilitating these changes and empowering caregivers. Let's create an educational system that educates you and your doctor and the care team. Education is what will drive behavioral modification-but it's not education the way that we used to do education. The education that we provide has got to be purposeful, it's got to be real time, it's got to be home-based, and it's got to be about the people who are caring for the people."