

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**MARYLAND RANKS HIGH IN KEY INDICATOR FOR PATIENT SAFETY:
4 STATE IN THE NATION FOR ELECTRONIC PRESCRIBING**

Getting Physicians and Pharmacists Connected Could Save Over \$200 Million Annually

**Maryland Pharmacists, Maryland State Medical Society and Delmarva Foundation to Launch
Statewide Campaign to Help Thousands More Physicians "Get Connected"**

ANNAPOLIS – May 8, 2006 – The community pharmacy industry today cited the state of Maryland and three physicians who practice in the state for outstanding efforts to improve patient safety and practice efficiency through the use of electronic prescribing technology. Drs. Gul Chablani (Rockville), Howard Goldstein (Annapolis) and Stephen Hamilton (Annapolis) were commended by leaders from community pharmacy with the first annual SafeRx™ award. Maryland finished fourth in the nation as part of the first ever nationwide review and ranking of electronic prescribing activity.

"SafeRx" recognizes how e-prescribing enhances patient safety by providing a more secure and accurate prescribing process. The National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS), the National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA) and SureScripts® sponsor the SafeRx award. The award goes to the top 10 e-prescribing states in the nation and three physicians within the winning states who have demonstrated outstanding leadership through their use of e-prescribing technology. Results are based on an analysis of data from new prescriptions and refill responses electronically transmitted over the SureScripts Electronic Prescribing Network™. States are ranked based on the number of prescriptions routed electronically in 2005 as a percentage of the total number of prescriptions eligible for electronic routing.

SafeRx Award Winners: Top 10 E-Prescribing States

1. Rhode Island
2. Nevada
3. Massachusetts
4. Maryland
5. Florida
6. Delaware
7. Virginia
8. North Carolina
9. Ohio
10. Michigan

Factors contributing to Maryland Top 10 finish include the following efforts:

- CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield – developed an e-prescribing incentive program whereby it provided free personal digital assistants (PDAs) to 500 primary care physicians, pediatricians and internists in CareFirst's provider networks, allowing them to electronically transmit prescriptions or prescription renewals directly to their patients' pharmacies.

- Delmarva Foundation – a national, not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving healthcare quality in over 20 states; its Doctor's Office Quality-Information Technology, or DOQ-IT, is a three-year project intended to provide support to physicians who wish to acquire, implement and fully utilize electronic health records (EHR) in their office to improve patient care and safety, and to improve the daily work of the physician and staff.
- Maryland Safety Through Electronic Prescribing (STEP) – a collaborative effort of twenty-seven of the leading healthcare organizations in Maryland to accelerate the voluntary adoption of electronic prescribing among physician practices in Maryland to improve patient safety.

E-Prescribing's Growth Opportunity: Save Time, Dollars and Much More

There remains a sizable opportunity to grow e-prescribing adoption and utilization across the country – including in all Top 10 SafeRx states. Realizing its full potential represents an unprecedented opportunity to improve patient safety and the efficiency of the prescribing process.

According to the Center for Information Technology Leadership (CITL), every year, more than 8 million Americans experience Adverse Drug Events (ADEs). CITL's research estimates that, by addressing ADEs caused by preventable medication errors, e-prescribing systems with a network connection to pharmacy and advanced decision support capabilities can help avoid more than 2 million ADEs annually -- 130,000 of which are life-threatening.

By eliminating paper from the prescribing process, e-prescribing has also been proven to offer significant time-savings by eliminating the need for phone calls and faxes, allowing prescribers and their staff more time to care for their patients.

A study by the Medical Group Management Association's (MGMA) Group Practice Research Network (GPRN) estimated that administrative complexity related to prescriptions costs a practice approximately \$15,700 a year for each full time physician on staff. Multiplying that figure by an estimated 13,500 office-based physicians currently practicing and prescribing medications in Maryland reveals an opportunity to save more than \$211 million from conversion to e-prescribing.

State Healthcare Leaders: Maryland Can Do Better

Starting tomorrow, the Maryland Pharmacists Association, the Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi), the Delmarva Foundation and many of the state's local community pharmacies will launch a statewide technology assessment. The assessment is designed to help physicians determine if their practice already possesses the technology to establish a direct, two-way, computer-to-computer connection with their local pharmacies. Practices will be sent the one-page assessment by fax and mail, or have the option to complete it online.

"Maryland is one of the leading states with regard to physicians and pharmacies communicating electronically. However, there are likely many more physicians using systems that could be connected to pharmacies, but are unaware of the possibility," said Michael Tooke, M.D. Chief Medical Officer, Delmarva Foundation. "We hope this campaign will encourage physicians to identify the technologies their practice already uses to confirm if they are able to make this connection."

The community pharmacy industry estimates that approximately 150,000 physicians in the United States could be using their existing electronic medical record (EMR) or e-prescribing technology to send and receive prescriptions directly to and from their local pharmacists' computers. The problem: Most are not aware of this. The result: Most use a computer or handheld device to – believe it or not – send fax-based prescriptions to their local pharmacists' fax machines.

In addition to improving patient safety and the efficiency of new prescription routing, a direct electronic connection with pharmacies also allows prescription refill requests to be sent directly to a physician's computer. Physicians and their staff may review and respond with just a few clicks

of their mouse. This significantly reduces the time spent managing what has traditionally been a phone and fax burdened process and leaves more time for patient care.

Over the last two and one-half years, Maryland pharmacies have made significant upgrades to their computer systems to allow physician practices to exchange prescription information with them electronically. With more and more physician practices -- and more than 50 percent of Maryland pharmacies -- now connected, e-prescribing has proven to be a more efficient and safe alternative to the traditionally paper-, phone- and fax-based prescribing process.

How To Get Connected

For more information about the Maryland e-prescribing technology assessment and to complete it online, physicians can go to www.GetRxConnected.com/MD. Physicians can also call with questions about the assessment or electronic prescribing in general: 1-866-RxReady (1-866-797-3239).

Upon completing and submitting the technology assessment, practices will receive a personalized *Practice Capability Report*. Based on a physician's individual answers to the assessment, the report will offer an estimate of the time and associated costs currently spent by the practice managing the refill process. The report will specify if a physician's practice possesses the technology to establish a true electronic connection with pharmacies in their area and outline steps on how to get connected.

The Get Connected campaign will also serve as a chance for more pharmacists to Get Connected by going to www.GetRxConnected.com/MD/pharmacist.

For patients, e-prescribing means a safer and more efficient prescribing process -- no more lost prescriptions, no trip to the pharmacy to drop off the prescription and no illegible handwriting for the pharmacist to interpret. Residents of Maryland who are interested in finding out more about how electronic prescribing benefits them and their families can go to www.GetRxConnected.com/MD/patients. The web site also features helpful advice on how residents can help their physician Get Connected to their local community pharmacy.

About NACDS

The National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS) represents the nation's leading retail chain pharmacies and suppliers, helping them better meet the changing needs of their patients and customers. Chain pharmacies operate more than 37,000 pharmacies, employ 114,000 pharmacists, fill more than 2.3 billion prescriptions yearly, and have annual sales of nearly \$700 billion. Other members include more than 1,000 suppliers of products and services to the chain drug industry. NACDS international membership has grown to include 93 members from 30 countries. For more information about NACDS, visit www.nacds.org.

About NCPA

The National Community Pharmacists Association, founded in 1898, represents the nation's community pharmacists, including the owners of more than 24,000 pharmacies. The nation's independent pharmacies, independent pharmacy franchises, and independent chains employ more than 400,000 people and represent a \$98 billion marketplace, dispensing nearly half of the nation's retail prescription medicines.

About SureScripts

SureScripts®, the largest network provider of electronic prescribing services, is committed to building relationships within the health care community and working collaboratively with key industry stakeholders and organizations to improve the safety, efficiency and quality of health care by improving the overall prescribing process. At the core of this improvement effort is the SureScripts Electronic Prescribing Network™, a health care infrastructure which establishes electronic communications between pharmacists and physicians and enables the two-way

electronic exchange of prescription information. Today, 90 percent of all pharmacies in the United States are certified on the SureScripts network. More information about SureScripts is available at www.surescripts.com.

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