

## **UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND SCHOOL OF MEDICINE TO ESTABLISH CENTER OF EXCELLENCE ON PROBLEM GAMBLING**

### ***Center will Centralize Resources and Expertise and Refer Problem Gamblers to Treatment Through a 24/7 Telephone Helpline***

Baltimore, Md. – September, 2012. The University of Maryland School of Medicine has received a 3-year, \$5 million dollar grant from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to establish a Center of Excellence on Problem Gambling. The center will create a coordinated and comprehensive approach to providing access to problem gambling services throughout the state. Services include training for up to one thousand behavioral health professionals annually, a telephone helpline service to refer problem gamblers to treatment, a public awareness campaign, and statewide prevention programs.

“Gambling is a problem when it causes family, financial, legal, emotional or other problems for the gambler, their family or others,” says Christopher Welsh M.D., associate professor of Psychiatry at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, and medical director of the University of Maryland Center for Problem Gambling. “The center, to be located on the University of Maryland campus, will centralize resources and expertise in one location so those who need help can get it as quickly as possible.”

The center will emphasize training for current behavioral health providers, including addiction counselors, therapists, social workers, psychiatrists and psychologists. The center plans to host two annual statewide conferences, eight regional conferences and webinars in order to create a statewide network of health providers to help problem gamblers. Health providers will receive 15 to 30 hours of training on how to recognize and help problem gamblers. Advanced training opportunities and national certification will also be available.

“A recent study determined the prevalence of problem or pathological gambling among adults is 3.4 percent in Maryland,” says Joanna Franklin, MS, director of the center. “With the expansion of gambling in Maryland, we should be prepared for the possibility that the number of problem gamblers will rise,” says Franklin, who will oversee the center’s training programs.

The center's clinical training program will provide specialized knowledge of gambling treatment, so counselors can help with complicated financial restitution needs, legal conflicts, vocational and interpersonal problems and relational conflicts specific to problem gamblers and their families.

The public awareness campaign will use radio and TV ads, public services announcements and billboards to promote the helpline number (1-800-522-4700). Operated in cooperation with the Maryland Council on Problem Gambling, the helpline is staffed 24 hours a day and is answered by a specially trained counselor who can refer people to local treatment resources and support groups. The helpline number is required by law to be displayed in all Maryland casinos. All calls are confidential and referrals for treatment services are available to all callers, regardless of their ability to pay.

The creation of a centralized center of excellence at the University of Maryland represents a major step forward in our ability help those who have a gambling problem," says E. Albert Reece, M.D., Ph.D., M.B.A., vice president for medical affairs at the University of Maryland and dean of the University of Maryland School of Medicine. "The center's research component will enable investigators to better understand addiction to gambling and measure the effectiveness of our training and community outreach efforts."

The center will provide mini-grants to fund interdisciplinary research projects within the professional schools of the University of Maryland. In addition, a resource library for behavioral health care providers and the public will be housed at the center, providing detailed information about problem gambling, the signs and symptoms, referral resources, and self-help groups. The center, to be located at 419 West Redwood Street in Baltimore, will have four full-time staff members.

The center grant comes from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and is funded by the state's Problem Gambling Fund. Under Maryland law, slot machine operators pay an annual fee for each slot machine to support the fund.

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