News Release May 9, 2002

Former first lady leads expert panel in identifying caregiving and mental health’s key issues

ATLANTA—Caregivers are not getting the care that they need—that’s the message former First Lady Rosalynn Carter shared with a panel of experts meeting in Atlanta.

May 2 and 3, the team of national experts gathered at the Carter Center on behalf of the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Human Development (RCI).

“The mental health of caregivers is often overlooked when it comes to addressing the needs of mentally ill people,” Carter said. “The attention is often only on the mentally ill person, with little or no attention being given to family members and others who are caregiving. We need to ensure that the mental needs of both care recipients and caregivers are taken into consideration when planning and funding family support services.”

The 11 panelists concurred with Carter, and at the conclusion of the two-day session, identified six key areas of focus in caregiving and mental health:

- Focus on the positive results of caregiving
- Fragmentation exists in the delivery system
- Caregiving is inherently spiritual
- Culture needs to be defined broadly: by age, ethnicity, disability and illness
- Communities need to develop integrated approaches to caregiving
- Professional caregivers need support services

The RCI, affiliated with Carter’s alma mater of Georgia Southwestern State University in Americus, was formed in 1987. In 2000, Johnson & Johnson partnered with the RCI to create a signature program in caregiving. The J&J/RCI Caregivers Program is a unique business/academic partnership that addresses areas in need of caregiving through a Practice in Action component and a Science to Practice Initiative. In the Science to Practice Initiative, several expert panels have been convened to consider issues related to their specialty areas. Each panel will produce a book as part of a new caregiving book series, to be published in 2003.

REPORTERS/EDITORS:

Members of the media are invited to cover ongoing panel discussions at the Carter Center in Atlanta. For more
Former first lady leads expert panel in Mental Health

information, call Wes Sumner at (229) 931-2038 or the RCI at (229) 928-1234.

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