American Cancer Society Honors Innovative Achievements in Palliative Care

Charles von Gunten, M.D., Ph.D. to Receive 2012 Pathfinder in Palliative Care Award

ATLANTA — November 16, 2012— Charles von Gunten, M.D., Ph.D., oncologist and founder of one of the earliest academic hospital palliative care programs at Northwestern University Medical School and Hospitals, is the recipient of the 2012 American Cancer Society Pathfinder in Palliative Care Award. The award, which will be presented today at the Society's Nationwide Volunteer and Staff Leadership Summit in Atlanta, recognizes individuals who have demonstrated innovation and ingenuity in their contributions to the advancement of the field of palliative care.

"The American Cancer Society is committed to both saving lives and improving the quality of life of individuals and families facing cancer," said Vincent T. DeVita Jr., M.D., volunteer president of the American Cancer Society. "Dr. von Gunten deserves to be recognized for his commitment to his field and for his pioneering efforts to improve palliative care in this country."

Dr. von Gunten is one of very few internationally recognized palliative medicine educators. Under his leadership, among the earliest palliative medicine graduate fellowship training programs were launched at Northwestern University, and he now leads the largest palliative medicine fellowship training program in the nation at San Diego Hospice and University of California San Diego. Arguably Dr. von Gunten's most important contribution is his leadership of the national effort to achieve American Board of Medical Specialties endorsement of palliative medicine as a formal new subspecialty of ten participating parent Boards in 2006 (among them internal medicine, surgery, pediatrics, neurology, and anesthesiology).

Among other important accomplishments, Dr. von Gunten initiated, conceptualized, sought and received Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and NCI-R25 funding for, and wrote the national physician curriculum on palliative medicine which has provided intensive two-day training in palliative medicine for hundreds of thousands of physicians world-wide through a train-the trainer model. Based on his original concept and leadership, today there are more than 2,000 EPEC trainers in the United States and 16 other countries.

The goal of palliative care is to prevent and relieve suffering and to support the best possible quality of life for patients and their families – at any age and at any stage of disease. Through an innovative extramural grant partnership with the National Palliative Care Research Center created to cultivate a cadre of researchers and mentors in the field and collaborative work among them, the American Cancer Society has dedicated nearly $18 million to support 51 palliative care and symptom management research grants since 2007. Building on the success of that research program, the Society's affiliate advocacy organization, the American Cancer Society Cancer Action NetworkSM (ACS CAN), is now a driving force behind a new suite of Quality of Life legislation to boost palliative care and pain management research, workforce training, and access to these patient centered services for all seriously ill patients and families in every care setting.

About the American Cancer Society
The American Cancer Society combines an unyielding passion with nearly a century of experience to save lives and end cancer for good. As a global grassroots force of three million volunteers, we fight for every birthday threatened by every cancer in every community. We save lives by helping you stay well by preventing cancer or detecting it early, helping you get well by being there for you during and after a diagnosis, by finding cures through groundbreaking discovery and fighting back through public policy. As the nation's largest non-governmental investor in cancer research, contributing more than $3.8 billion, we turn what we know about cancer into what we do. As a result, an estimated 13.7 million people in America who have had cancer and countless more who have avoided it will be celebrating birthdays this year. To learn more about us or to get help, call us anytime, day or night, at 1-800-227-2345 or visit cancer.org.