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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CALIFORNIA ERs IN CRISIS

National Report Card on Emergency Care Ranks the State 37th Overall; 51st in Access to Emergency Care

SACRAMENTO, CA – California received an overall “D+” on the American College of Emergency Physicians’ (ACEP) *National Report Card on the State of Emergency Medicine* today, ranking California’s emergency care system 37th in the nation, with failing and nearly-failing grades in key indicators of the health of its emergency care system.

“The dire state of emergency care in California is something that we have been begging the governor and legislature to address,” said Dr. Billy Mallon, President of the California Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians (CAL/ACEP). “California’s emergency care safety net is unraveling.”

Largely dragged down by its “F” grade on “Access to Emergency Care”, California’s overall grade reflects the grave challenges facing the state’s ability to provide timely emergency care to its residents. The “Access to Emergency Care” mark reflects the serious lack of on-call specialists who provide critical, specialized care like obstetricians and gynecologists, neurologists and cardiologists; a below-average number of trauma centers; a lack of inpatient hospital beds; serious emergency room (ER) overcrowding and patient boarding; and fewer than half the national average number of ERs per million residents.

“2007 and 2008 were devoted to health care reform. Instead of reforming it, the health care system has been allowed to deteriorate,” said Dr. Robert Rosenbloom, CAL/ACEP President-elect, “2008 instead brought a balanced state budget that cut insurance for children and the poor and cut reimbursement rates making the problem worse. This report card shows that Californians are paying with their health.”

“Californians need to stand up and demand that their elected officials address the crisis in emergency care,” noted Dr. Mike Salomon, an ER doctor in Davis, “How long do wait times have to get? How many patients have to die? What will it take before lawmakers do everything in their power to repair the safety net?”

ACEP reported that the lack of inpatient, or non-ER hospital beds, combined with high daily occupancy rate of those beds has severely limited the ability of hospitals to admit patients into the hospital from the ER. This leads to a practice known as “patient boarding”, wherein patients who have already been treated by the ER doctor or nurse and no longer need to be in the ER, but

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need to be admitted to the hospital for further care are forced to wait in beds in the ER for hours, sometimes days, while they wait for a regular inpatient bed to open in the hospital. Because ER beds remain full of treated patients, those patients in the waiting room are forced to wait even longer, because there is simply no place to treat them, which leads to severe ER overcrowding.

“Overcrowding and patient boarding are probably the most serious of all the challenges facing California ERs today,” Dr. Mallon continued, “Californians need to understand that this problem affects ERs across the state, not just big county hospitals, but smaller ERs in their own communities.”

While California received high marks for its efforts in the area of “Public Health & Injury Prevention”, for policies like the motorcycle helmet law and for California’s comparatively low rate of smoking, ACEP noted that the California’s crisis in California is exacerbated by “...high rates of uninsured adults and children and relatively low Medicaid reimbursement rates...”

“California’s ER crisis can’t be ignored. If everyone just assumes that these problems will take care of themselves, that there will always be an open ER when they need one, our safety net will continue to unravel to the point where the nearest ER might be an hour away instead of five minutes – and that will be the difference between life and death,” Dr. Mallon warned.

CAL/ACEP is the largest state chapter of ACEP; with more than 2,000 members it represents the vast majority of California’s board-certified emergency physicians and advocates for emergency care patients and emergency physicians, and promotes the emergency care safety net as well as the practice of emergency medicine.

ACEP’s full report can be found on the CAL/ACEP Advocacy website at www.calacep.org/anf.

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