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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MUSM, GRHIC Select Rural Hospitals for Year Four of KidsABC Program

MACON, Ga. — Mercer University School of Medicine (MUSM) and its Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center (GRHIC), with continued support from Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta (Children’s), are expanding their statewide rural pediatric health initiative for the fourth consecutive year. The Kids Alliance for Better Care (KidsABC) now includes 28 rural hospitals across the state.

The newest hospitals selected to join KidsABC in year four include:

- Appling Healthcare, Appling County
- Dorminy Medical Center, Ben Hill County
- Emanuel Medical Center, Emanuel County
- Memorial Hospital & Manor, Decatur County
- Phoebe Sumter Medical Center, Sumter County
- SGMC Health Lanier, Lanier County
- Union General Hospital, Union County

Launched in February 2023, KidsABC addresses the significant challenges rural hospitals face in delivering pediatric care in their local emergency departments. KidsABC is committed to providing child-friendly equipment, resources and tools, and staff training to support hospitals and staff in delivering effective pediatric care in their communities.

“Rural hospitals provide excellent care to patients, including children. The KidsABC program comes alongside these hospitals to expand and strengthen the care they already give,” said MUSM Dean Jean R. Sumner, M.D., MACP. “The staff are dedicated to completing specialized training in pediatric-specific emergency care and enhancing their skillsets, all with the goal of keeping kids close to home whenever possible.”

“It is inspiring to see the momentum we continue to build in expanding access to high-quality pediatric care across Georgia,” said Children’s Chief Executive Officer Donna Hyland. “We are proud of the adult hospital systems working with KidsABC, and we are excited by the growing number of success stories, each driven by real, meaningful results for families who call rural Georgia home.”

KidsABC creates a statewide network of rural hospital emergency departments, pediatric and family medicine physicians, regional pediatric hospitals and school systems, working collaboratively to:

- Provide rural hospital emergency department support through pediatric training, clinical guidance and regional network building
- Deliver physician-to-physician telehealth and provider training for pediatricians, advanced practice providers and nurses
- Expand behavioral and mental health services, including virtual counseling for students and school-based mental health assessments and training

Ensuring these gains are sustainable by expanding the rural pediatric workforce is essential to increasing access to primary care and mental healthcare for children. With this in mind, the Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta Rural Pediatric Scholarship Program offers 10 annual scholarships to Mercer medical students committed to practicing in rural Georgia. The Children’s Family Therapy Scholarship Program supports students training to provide mental health services in rural communities.

KidsABC will continue its expansion over the next seven years, with the goal of strengthening pediatric care throughout all of rural Georgia.

For More Information:

KidsABC Initiatives: <https://den.mercer.edu/school-of-medicine-announces-community-partners-in-rural-pediatric-health-care-initiative/>

KidsABC Rural Hospital Emergency Department Collaborative

Expansion: <https://den.mercer.edu/musm-and-grhic-expand-major-rural-pediatric-health-care-initiative-to-newly-selected-hospitals/>

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About Mercer University School of Medicine (Macon, Savannah and Columbus)

Mercer University’s School of Medicine was established in 1982 to educate physicians and health professionals to meet the primary care and healthcare needs of rural and medically underserved areas of Georgia. Today, more than 60 percent of graduates currently practice in the state of Georgia, and of those, more than 80 percent are practicing in rural or medically underserved areas of Georgia. Mercer medical students benefit from a problem-based medical education program that provides early patient care experiences. Such an academic environment fosters the early development of clinical problem-solving and instills in each student an awareness of the place of the basic medical sciences in medical practice. The School opened additional four-year M.D. campuses in Savannah in 2008 and in Columbus in 2021, and a clinical campus in Valdosta in 2024. Following their second year, students participate in core clinical clerkships at the School’s primary teaching hospitals: Atrium Health Navicent The Medical Center and Piedmont Macon Medical Center in Macon; Memorial Health University Medical Center in Savannah; Piedmont Columbus Regional Hospital and St. Francis Hospital in Columbus; and SGMC Health in Valdosta. The School also offers master’s degrees in preclinical sciences and family therapy and Ph.D.s in biomedical sciences and rural health sciences.

About Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center

In 2018, Georgia lawmakers dedicated special funds to establish a new Rural Health Innovation Center tasked with confronting the complex healthcare challenges and wellness disparities facing rural communities. Mercer University School of Medicine was awarded the grant funds in 2019 and formally established the Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center on its Macon campus. MUSM boasts a longstanding commitment to serving rural Georgia’s health needs, with a mission to educate physicians dedicated to tackling the health challenges in rural Georgia. The Rural Health Innovation Center serves as a critical resource to rural

communities to improve access and effectiveness of healthcare by offering research, collaboration, and training opportunities.

About Children's Healthcare of Atlanta

As the only freestanding pediatric healthcare system in Georgia, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta is the trusted leader in caring for kids. The not-for-profit organization's mission is to make kids better today and healthier tomorrow through more than 60 pediatric specialties and programs, top healthcare professionals, and leading research and technology. Children's is one of the largest pediatric clinical care providers in the country, managing more than one million patient visits annually at three hospitals (Arthur M. Blank, Hughes Spalding and Scottish Rite), Marcus Autism Center, the Center for Advanced Pediatrics, the Zalik Behavioral and Mental Health Center, urgent care centers and neighborhood locations. Consistently ranked among the top children's hospitals by U.S. News & World Report, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta has impacted the lives of kids in Georgia, across the United States and around the world for more than 100 years thanks to generous support from the community.