



Contact: Rick Griffin Public Relations
info@rickgriffin.com, (619) 461-3104

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE AUGUST 2, 2007

**GROSSMONT COLLEGE'S WELCOME BACK CENTER RECEIVES GRANT
FOR NURSING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND DIVERSITY**

El Cajon -- The San Diego Welcome Back Center (WBC), an international healthcare worker assistance program hosted by Grossmont College, has announced it has been selected as the recipient of a three-year, \$865,000 grant from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) that will help healthcare professionals from other countries continue their medical careers as licensed registered nurses in the U.S.

The three-year grant for WBC's Nursing Development and Diversity Project is anticipated to total \$291,000 for the first year, and \$287,000 per year for the final two years, according to Dr. Rolando Castillo, WBC Director. He said the grant will allow WBC staff to assist internationally trained nurses and medical graduates with career counseling and educational information so that they can successfully navigate California's educational and licensing system and eventually obtain the necessary credentials, licenses or certificates that are required to work as a registered nurse in California's healthcare system.

"This federal grant will be critical in sustaining the Welcome Back Center's innovative approach to diversity in the healthcare industry and effectively assisting internationally trained healthcare professionals from around the world who are interested in re-entering the healthcare workforce while, at the same time, providing solutions to the healthcare worker shortage," said Dr. Sunita V. Cooke, Grossmont College President, a native of Lucknow, India, who immigrated to the United States at age 5 with her family because her mother, a nurse, was recruited to address a nursing shortage at the time.

"Because the need is great for linguistically and culturally competent nurses, especially in underserved communities, this grant will support our program's goal to serve as a bridge and help internationally trained medical graduates build on their many assets," said Castillo, who oversaw the opening of San Diego's WBC office in March 2001. Since then,

WBC has assisted more than 2,600 individuals both in San Diego and Imperial counties, he said.

"We are grateful for the assistance of Congressman Bob Filner who recognized this urged need and his support in obtaining this competitive federal grant under the Title VIII 2007 Nursing Workforce Diversity program," added Castillo. "The grant will assist in the implementation of President Bush's multi-year Nursing Workforce Development initiative to help increase nursing education opportunities for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, including racial and ethnic minorities underrepresented among registered nurses."

According to Bob Yarris, Director of the Grossmont College Regional Health Occupations Resource Center (RHORC), which coordinates the Welcome Back Center, "Our region has a sizable, ethnically diverse population, challenged with a variety of health-related issues, including the cost of healthcare. We believe there are thousands of immigrants living in Southern California who used to be doctors and nurses in their native countries and are currently working outside of the medical professional because they have not met respective California licensing requirements. This grant will both address these individuals and the nursing workforce shortage, as well as the disparity in the ethnic and gender makeup of the healthcare workforce. Our communities will benefit with a more culturally competent workforce and enhanced patient care outcomes, especially for underserved patients."

The three-year, \$865,000 grant is the second one WBC has received from HRSA. In 2004, WBC was selected for another three-year, \$843,000 grant to assist internationally-trained health workers.

WBC currently offers the only accelerated nursing education program among the 107 community colleges in California. Among the classes offered by WBC: a class for passing the National Council of State Boards of Nursing's National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) test, which is required to become a licensed nurse in the U.S. and its territories; a class to familiarize internationally trained medical graduates with the U.S. healthcare system; and, classes designed to improve English vocabulary for international healthcare professionals. Other services include assistance with test taking, critical thinking skills, study skills and information on financial assistance programs.

The Welcome Back Center, a statewide initiative sponsored by The California Endowment with support from the California Wellness Foundation, is a project of the Regional Health Occupations Resource Center, and is hosted by Grossmont College in El Cajon, Calif. For more information about the Welcome Back Center, visit www.welcomebackcenter.org.

#