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## News Release

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### **For Immediate Release**

#### **Mayo Clinic and The Links, Incorporated Collaborate to Reduce Health Disparities in the African American Community**

ROCHESTER, Minn. and WASHINGTON — The world's first and largest group medical practice and one of the nation's premier volunteer service organizations of professional African American women are joining forces to eradicate health disparities among communities of color in the United States. Mayo Clinic and The Links, Incorporated have established a formal collaboration that aims to develop a more diverse health care workforce. The joint initiative ranges from raising health awareness in the African American community to facilitating scientific research — with a special focus on cardiovascular disease, cancer, organ transplantation and obesity. The collaboration stems from one patient's experience.

Ginger Wilson, a Chicago lawyer and businesswoman, had been experiencing breathing problems — wheezing, shortness of breath — as well as weight loss, inflammation and digestive issues.

“After 18 months, I had been diagnosed with asthma, an intestinal bug, an ulcer, rosacea and more,” she says. “I received treatment for the individual symptoms, but never one diagnosis for all the symptoms.”

One day, while on an outing, Wilson found she couldn't hike more than a few hundred yards. A friend, who was a doctor in training at Mayo Clinic, asked if she'd been checked for carcinoid syndrome, a condition caused by secretions from a slow-growing tumor. Wilson traveled to Mayo Clinic for evaluation, where the diagnosis was confirmed and she underwent treatment. Seven surgeries later, she is back to being active in her Chicago community and owns the first African American female legal staffing firm.

Wilson shared her experience with her friends at Mayo and The Links, Incorporated. Conversations occurred, connections were made and pilot projects developed. To date, educational

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forums have been held with Mayo Clinic physicians and Links chapters in Chicago and Atlanta. Public service announcements have been produced, and research findings from a collaborative survey were presented at the National Medical Association and other scientific venues. The message: “Listen to your body, be proactive with your health.”

“Wilson’s experience is a microcosm of what we hope will happen from this collaboration,” says Monica Parker, M.D., Emory Health System physician and director of the Health and Human Services facet of The Links, Incorporated. “A strong personal relationship, a sharing of health care information, a level of trust, and an optimal outcome based on quality research-based medicine is our hope for everyone with health care needs.”

“The potential for this groundbreaking relationship is enormous. Our organizations have mutual goals and the determination and means to make those goals a reality,” says Sharonne N. Hayes, M.D., cardiologist and director of the Mayo Clinic Office of Diversity and Inclusion. “Health care disparities among minority populations should be a concern for everyone in the country. Unfortunately, the quality of medical care can still depend on your race, your gender or your ZIP code.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, African American women:

- Are more likely to die of breast cancer than other women
- Have cancers that grow faster and are harder to treat and are less likely to get prompt follow-up care when their mammogram shows something that is not normal
- Are less likely than white women to survive five years after a breast cancer diagnosis
- Are at least 50 percent more likely to die of heart disease or stroke prematurely than white women

In the coming months, Mayo Clinic and The Links, Incorporated collaboration will include educational outreach, critical research and programs to prepare and encourage minorities to choose medical and health careers. Mayo Clinic and The Links, Incorporated are continuously exploring opportunities for collaborative programming based on needs within the communities they serve.

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### *About Mayo Clinic*

Mayo Clinic is a nonprofit worldwide leader in medical care, research and education for people from all walks of life. For more information, visit <http://www.mayoclinic.org/about> and [www.mayoclinic.org/news](http://www.mayoclinic.org/news).

Journalists can become a member of the Mayo Clinic News Network for the latest health, science and research news and access to video, audio, text and graphic elements that can be downloaded or embedded.

### *About The Links, Incorporated*

*The Links, Incorporated celebrates more than 65 years as a women’s volunteer service organization committed to enriching, sustaining and ensuring the cultural and economic survival of African Americans and other persons of African ancestry. A premier international service organization with more than 12,000 members in 276 chapters*

*located in 41 states, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, its legacy of friends provides service that changes lives, established by the original circle of nine friends in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1946.*

*The members of The Links, Incorporated are influential decision makers and opinion leaders. The Links, Incorporated has attracted many distinguished women who are individual achievers and who have made a difference in their communities and the world. They are business and civic leaders, role models, mentors, activists and volunteers who work towards a common vision by engaging like-minded organizations and individuals for partnership. With more than 2 million service hours recorded in the past three years, members regularly contribute more than 500,000 documented service hours in their respective communities annually.*

*To learn more, visit [www.linksinc.org](http://www.linksinc.org).*