



## **Wellstar Health System and Augusta University Health System reach agreement for statewide health care partnership**

*The new partnership will make a transformational impact on improving the health and well-being of Georgians through education, research and innovative patient care.*

MARIETTA, Ga. and AUGUSTA, Ga. (March 31, 2023) – Wellstar Health System and Augusta University Health System (AUHS) have reached an agreement to form an innovative new partnership that expands Augusta University’s health sciences training and research across the state and builds a broader affiliation between Wellstar Health System and the university’s Medical College of Georgia (MCG). The agreements were approved this week by the boards of Wellstar and AUHS, as well as the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia.

Wellstar, AUHS and Augusta University share a mission to create a healthier future for Georgians and solve health care challenges across the state. Through this partnership, they plan to make a transformational impact on improving the health and well-being of every patient they serve.

“This is an important day for health care in Georgia. I am excited for the benefits that this partnership will provide our state, including world-class care sites, greater access to care for our communities and more training and education for physicians and other vitally important health care providers at Augusta University and its outstanding Medical College of Georgia,” said Georgia Governor Brian Kemp.

To be known as Wellstar MCG Health, the partnership will expand medical training, research and clinical care throughout Georgia, while implementing a successful model of bringing together community-based health systems and academic medical centers like MCG and its affiliate hospitals. MCG and Augusta University are part of the University System of Georgia (USG), and MCG serves as the only public medical school in the state.

“This partnership combines the strengths of AUHS, Augusta University and Wellstar to advance medical education and research and provide more access to quality health care where people need it most, especially in rural Georgia,” USG Chancellor Sonny Perdue said. “It allows AUHS to benefit from Wellstar’s efficiencies in the delivery of health care and provide experiential education in a modern clinical environment, which increases MCG’s positive impact on local communities and Georgia’s medical workforce.”

Upon regulatory approval, the partnership will focus on five areas to create a healthier future for Georgia:

- **Access to Expertise:** Creating an ecosystem of care that provides the most advanced clinical care, innovative academic teaching models and lifesaving research to all corners of the state and beyond.
- **Expanding the Pipeline of Clinicians:** Making significant investments to increase the number of physicians trained in Georgia at the Medical College of Georgia.
- **Care Innovation:** Creating new and innovative clinical care offerings and models to enhance the health and well-being of patients they serve.
- **Pediatric Care:** Bringing Wellstar and AUHS's exemplary pediatric care to more Georgians across the state through Children's Hospital of Georgia and Wellstar's dedicated pediatric care and emergency departments.
- **Digital Health:** Making significant investments in improving clinical IT, modernizing digital care centers and adding remote care offerings backed by the academic medical expertise of the Medical College of Georgia.

"Improving healthcare for Georgians requires taking new approaches, creating innovative care models and unprecedented collaboration," said Candice L. Saunders, FACHE, president and chief executive officer of Wellstar Health System. "This partnership will bring together the best capabilities and innovations from Wellstar, AUHS and the Medical College of Georgia to advance healthcare in Georgia, making it easier for patients to get the care they need wherever they are."

"As our two organizations have worked together over the last three months to reach this agreement, the rationale for our partnering with Wellstar has only grown stronger – to enable our health system to thrive in today's challenging health care environment and to extend our mission of improving health for all Georgians through excellence in patient care, education and research," said Brooks Keel, PhD, president of Augusta University and acting chief executive officer for Augusta University Health System. "Our partnership with Wellstar will secure the long-term future of academic medicine-influenced health care in Augusta and the surrounding region, increase the number of physicians, nurses and allied health professionals we are able to train and make substantial investments in our health care facilities and new technologies to provide care in more convenient settings for patients across Georgia."

In the proposed agreement, Wellstar has committed to investing nearly \$800 million over 10 years in AUHS facilities and infrastructure, including more than \$200 million allocated to Augusta University Medical Center – a more than 600-bed safety net and teaching hospital. Additionally, capital for a new hospital, medical office building and ambulatory surgery center in Columbia County and the costs associated with implementing a new state-funded electronic medical records system throughout AUHS will be funded. These investments will result in strengthened and expanded community programs, economic activity and jobs across the region.

“Our affiliation with Wellstar will accelerate the advances MCG will make in clinical care, medical education as well as research across the state. This includes enabling a larger number of students and residents to have expanded opportunities to learn from some of the most highly qualified physicians and other health care professionals in our state,” said David Hess, MD, dean of the Medical College of Georgia and executive vice president of medical affairs and integration at Augusta University.

The primary AUHS clinical sites involved in the agreement include AUMC, Children’s Hospital of Georgia, the clinical operations of the Georgia Cancer Center, Roosevelt Warm Springs Rehabilitation Hospital and the new hospital in Columbia County.

“I’m grateful for the support of Governor Kemp and the General Assembly as we’ve worked to ensure the future of AUHS and find a partner willing to invest in the newest facilities, technology and equipment to care for patients and provide state-of-the-art training for MCG’s medical students and residents,” USG Board of Regents Chairman Harold Reynolds said.

The agreement also includes AU Medical Associates, the physician practice plan comprised of faculty physicians who have appointments at MCG and community physicians directly employed by the plan, as well as several clinics and other health care sites in Augusta, throughout Georgia and in certain counties in South Carolina.

“As an Augusta resident, I’m excited to see the potential of MCG as it grows and matures into what I believe is one of the best public medical schools in the nation,” said USG Regent Jim Hull, chairman of the AUHS Board of Directors. “This partnership is vital for that journey and will only enhance both MCG’s reputation and Augusta University’s recognition as a best-in-class research university.”

Pending regulatory approvals, the organizations plan to close the partnership in late summer.

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### **About Augusta University Health System**

Augusta University Health System, in partnership with the Medical College of Georgia, is Georgia's only public academic health center and a place where world-class clinicians are bringing the medicine of tomorrow to patient care today. As the primary teaching affiliate of MCG, AUHS provides the most comprehensive routine-to-complex care at AU Medical Center, which houses the region's only Level 1 trauma center, Children’s Hospital of Georgia, which houses the regions only Level IV NICU, the Georgia Cancer Center, as well as historic Roosevelt Warm Springs Rehabilitation and Specialty Hospitals, a virtual care network and more than 80 primary and specialty, and subspecialty care clinics across the state. Learn more at [augustahealth.org](http://augustahealth.org).

### **About Wellstar Health System**

As one of the most advanced and integrated health systems in Georgia, Wellstar Health System doesn’t take a one size fits all approach to healthcare. We provide deeply personal care that

takes each person's unique life story into account. With 24,000 team members, nurses and doctors, Wellstar provides compassionate, high-quality care. Our team is made up of more Top Doctors than any other health care system in Georgia, across nearly every specialty. We are training the next generation of clinicians, offering graduate medical education that prepares clinicians to deliver the highest quality of health care to our community. Several Wellstar facilities have been recognized in the U.S. News & World Report Best Hospitals rankings for providing world-class care in a variety of specialties, including cardiology, neurology, cancer care and pediatrics. In addition, Wellstar Paulding Hospital has been awarded the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, the nation's highest level of recognition for performance excellence. Wellstar is the only health system to have a digital innovation hub – Catalyst by Wellstar. Catalyst by Wellstar is the -first-of-its-kind innovation company and venture firm created and operated within a health ecosystem to holistically address healthcare disruption by harnessing problems, building solutions, deploying capital and establishing strategic partnerships across industries. Wellstar operates the only comprehensive trauma care system in the state with Level II, Level III and Level IV trauma centers, pediatric emergency departments and a dedicated Burn Center. These centers help us serve the most critical patients with a range of emergency care options. Together, we're proud to have served one out of every six Georgians, including patients from 148 out of 159 Georgia counties. We provide nearly \$1 billion in uncompensated care in Georgia annually and have been recognized as one of the top 10 providers nationally on charity care. Through more than 450 community partnerships, including our Wellstar Center for Health Equity, the care we provide in our community extends far beyond the walls of our facilities. And our journey continues as we work to reach patients and families in new communities in new ways— to enhance the health and well-being of every person we serve.

### **About Augusta University**

As one of Georgia's four public research institutions, Augusta University offers customizable, accessible education on campuses in Augusta and across the state. Augusta University aims not only to be different, but also to make a difference — to reimagine and recreate the future of art, technology, education and health care. Home to Georgia's only public academic medical center and designated by the state as a health sciences center of excellence, Augusta University is dedicated to creating a safer, healthier and more equitable Georgia. Learn more at [augusta.edu](http://augusta.edu).

### **About the Medical College of Georgia**

The Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University is one of the nation's largest medical schools by class size, with 264 students per class. The educational experience is anchored by the main campus in Augusta, regional clinical campuses for third- and fourth-year students across the state and a second four-year campus in Athens in partnership with the University of Georgia. MCG's expanding partnerships with physicians and hospitals across Georgia currently provides about 350 sites where students can experience the full spectrum of medicine, from complex care hospitals to small-town solo practices. MCG and its teaching hospitals also provide postgraduate education to more than 500 residents and fellows in more than 50 different Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education-approved programs.