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AACI Executive Director to Retire in October

After nearly two decades of leadership and service as founding executive director of the Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI), Barbara Duffy Stewart, MPH, has announced her retirement, effective October 15.

Ms. Stewart's notable career in cancer research advocacy began at the Pittsburgh Cancer Institute (now known as the UPMC Hillman Cancer Center). As director of communications and public affairs, Ms. Stewart was among a small group, including center director Ronald B. Herberman, MD, who launched the cancer institute in 1985.

AACI began in 1958 as an informal gathering of cancer center directors. In 1999, during a rapid expansion of the National Cancer Institute's budget and increased patient advocacy for cancer research, AACI's board of directors hired Ms. Stewart as the organization's first executive director.

Beyond building a staff and instituting sound governance practices, Ms. Stewart has guided AACI through a significant period of growth and influence. Membership has expanded from 78 cancer centers in 1999 to 98 today, including two in Canada, with annual meeting attendance increasing by 60 percent since 2011. AACI is the only professional association that focuses exclusively on academic cancer centers.

"Barbara has led the AACI from its inception with exceptional skill and grace," said AACI President Stanton L. Gerson, MD. "We have all benefited from her wisdom and commitment to our collective mission, and her strong, steady hand in guiding our organization. She

understands the art of scientific politics and has elevated AACI to its rightful place as the premier organization representing North America's academic cancer centers."

AACI's Board of Directors has approved the appointment of Jennifer W. Pegher, MA, as the association's next executive director. Ms. Pegher is currently AACI deputy director and served as director of government relations for five years. She holds a master's degree in government from Johns Hopkins University and has deep experience in Washington, DC, having worked for former Congressman Philip S. English of Pennsylvania and the National Association of Federally-Insured Credit Unions, formerly the National Association of Federal Credit Unions. She also served as Executive Director of the Western Pennsylvania Chapter of the National Hemophilia Foundation before joining AACI.

"As a result of Barbara's leadership, AACI has had a remarkable impact, benefitting our patients, our centers and our public policy," said AACI President-elect Roy A. Jensen, MD.

"While we will all miss Barbara, her legacy includes recruiting and mentoring the extraordinarily talented Jennifer Pegher, who is well positioned to continue the upward trajectory of our organization. I congratulate Barbara on her outstanding career and look forward to continuing AACI's critically important work of enhancing the impact and influence of our member institutions."

AACI's hallmark programs and member services include the AACI Clinical Research Initiative, which will host its 10th annual meeting this year in Chicago. An annual visit to Capitol Hill convenes cancer center directors, researchers, physician-scientists, cancer survivors and other advocates for meetings with legislators and their staff to build support for a strong federal investment in cancer research. Other areas of AACI activity include a focus on cancer center networks, physician clinical leadership, and the value of academic cancer centers.

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The Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI) comprises 98 premier academic and freestanding cancer research centers in the U.S. and Canada. AACI is dedicated to reducing the burden of cancer by enhancing the impact of the leading academic cancer centers.