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UNM Health Sciences Center News Release

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Governor Signs-off on Medical Isotope Center

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Governor Bill Richardson will be co-signing an agreement to establish the first medical isotopes center in the country on Tuesday, March 8. The New Mexico Center for Isotopes in Medicine (NMCIM) is a partnership between Los Alamos National Laboratory and the UNM Health Sciences Center College of Pharmacy whose objective is the discovery and development of new isotope-based drugs and technologies for diagnosis and treatment of diseases.

"New Mexico is an ideal location for the development of medical isotopes," says Dr. John A. Pieper, interim director of the NMCIM and dean of the College of Pharmacy. "The UNM College of Pharmacy founded the nation's first centralized radiopharmacy to manufacture and distribute radioactive drugs, and Los Alamos has one of the largest isotope production facilities in the world."

Medical isotopes can be used for diagnosis and treatment of cancer, mental illness and other diseases more effectively and with less harm to patients. However, making these drugs is difficult because isotopes can decay rapidly; in some cases as quickly as a couple of days.

By utilizing the isotope production facility at Los Alamos, the center can develop new products, perform the required pre-clinical and patient testing and make the new drugs available for use around the state and throughout the U.S. that will result in better care for current and future patients. The UNM Health Sciences Center also will expand its educational programs to create a high-tech work force needed to support the medical isotope industry that creates high-paying jobs in New Mexico.

Within the next five years, the NMCIM goal is to have developed products that will be marketed and distributed to physicians and hospitals in New Mexico and around the country. The NMCIM will be housed at the UNM Health Sciences Center College of Pharmacy, taking advantage of the proximity to the UNM Cancer Research & Treatment Center, The UNM MIND (Mental Illness and Neuroscience Discovery) Institute and the UNM School of Medicine. In addition, partnerships with Lovelace Respiratory Research Institute, TCI and other New Mexico businesses are included in the initiative.

The mission of the New Mexico Center for Isotopes in Medicine is to convene and leverage the unique isotope partners in New Mexico to become the premier full-service provider for stable and radioactive isotope production and radiopharmaceutical development for novel isotope-based diagnostic and therapeutic products.

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