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***Independent Physician Workforce Study
Confirms Kentuckians Face Access to Care Crisis
KMA Urges Protections for State's Endangered Species...YOUR DOCTOR!***

FRANKFORT, KY: The physician and medical student members of the Kentucky Medical Association (KMA) applaud and express deep concern about the Kentucky Institute of Medicine (KIOM) physician workforce study. It confirms what the Association and Kentucky patients have known for years...this state doesn't have enough doctors. According to the independent study, Kentucky currently needs 2,298 more active physicians to match the national average, which ranks the state 32nd lowest among the 50 states. The study can be reviewed at www.kyiom.org.

Commenting on the independent study, KMA President Thomas K. Slabaugh, Sr., MD, said, "The KMA has been telling everyone for years that we have a physician shortage. With the release of the KIOM study, we now realize just how bad our situation is."

Doctor Slabaugh added that the crisis should be an immediate concern for every Kentucky citizen, including public officials. "Gubernatorial candidates, our Congressional delegation, state legislators, local officials, the business community, patient advocates, and anyone who cares about the future of healthcare in Kentucky should begin an immediate dialogue about how to resolve this mounting problem, and the KMA is prepared to lead those discussions."

In addition to identifying Kentucky's physician shortage, the KIOM task force (see study for list of members) who supervised the study made several recommendations for improving the physician practice climate in Kentucky. Strategies to increase the supply and correct the maldistribution of physicians were included along with medical school debt relief. The task force also recommended reform of the state's broken medical liability system, which encourages frivolous lawsuits and forces physicians to stop practicing in Kentucky. Other recommendations call for increased support of state medical schools and students, plus residency programs. Also discussed were incentives to retain physicians in rural communities, where the crisis is felt most.

October 5, 2007

Page 2

The study further noted that physicians cited frustration with health insurance company managed care practices as a major reason for early retirement. “Maximizing physician time and resources for patient care by limiting health insurance hassles patients and doctors’ offices face will certainly help maintain Kentucky’s current physician workforce,” according to Doctor Slabaugh.

KMA Legislative Chairman Preston P. Nunnelley, MD, suggested that the 2008 Kentucky General Assembly could address many of these issues. He stated, “Access to quality healthcare provided by physicians is important to every aspect of Kentucky life, including patient care, economic development, and our overall well-being. The Governor and lawmakers can make a significant difference in the progress of addressing this issue, and the KMA urges the patients and physicians of Kentucky to call on public officials to take action by addressing some of the recommendations in the upcoming session.”

In the months leading up to the 2008 Kentucky General Assembly, KMA leaders indicate the Association will propose specific initiatives legislators should consider to protect an endangered species of Kentucky...YOUR DOCTOR! The Association also plans to engage and build consensus among a variety of groups about solutions for this problem, which affects us all.

The Kentucky Medical Association has represented physicians and their patients for more than 150 years. It is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of the practice of medicine, quality healthcare, and its affordability for all Kentuckians.

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