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WMed Topping Out Ceremony

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Welcome: Hal Jenson, MD, Founding Dean

Good afternoon, I’m Hal Jenson, Founding Dean of Western Michigan University School of Medicine.

On behalf of the WMU School of Medicine Board of Directors, I welcome you here today for this Topping Out Ceremony that marks yet another major milestone in the development of Kalamazoo’s new medical school. We are building the future of medical education in Kalamazoo. First I would like to introduce the President of WMU and the Chair of the WMU School of Medicine Board of Directors, Dr. John M. Dunn.

John M. Dunn remarks:

Good afternoon. Thank you, Hal and to everyone who is here today with us. The medical school is truly our community’s initiative as evidenced by your interest, enthusiasm, and continued support. The city of Kalamazoo has a rich legacy of excellence in education, healthcare, research and life science exploration – all of which are assets in the community that contribute to the development of a new medical school. These assets include: WMU – a nationally recognized university, Borgess Health and Bronson Healthcare – two nationally recognized hospitals, a 40 plus-year history of medical education, multiple outpatient facilities, a strong base of high-quality physicians, a century-long heritage of drug discovery and medical device development, generous community philanthropy, and a vibrant, supportive city.

Last October we hosted a groundbreaking ceremony for the new medical school building, some of you joined us for that special event. Once again I would like to thank William U. Parfet, chairman and CEO of MPI Research in Mattawan, for
donating this building to WMU to be used by the new medical school. The seven-story building is located on the W.E. Upjohn Campus of WMU School of Medicine. The campus is named after William Erastus Upjohn, Bill Parfet’s great grandfather, who moved from Hastings, Michigan to Kalamazoo to start The Upjohn Company in 1885. This property was the first piece of land he purchased. We are fortunate and privileged to have this site as the home of the new medical school. Thank you (Applause).

Construction crews have made significant progress over the past year on the $68 million dollar renovation and expansion project. The building is scheduled to be completed by June 2014 in time for the first class of medical students to begin in August 2014. And, on Sept. 18, 2014 we have a big event planned. You and the entire community are all invited. With our inaugural class of medical students on campus we will host a Grand Opening Celebration that you won’t want to miss. So, mark your calendars now.

For the past five years, several hundred people from across the community and Southwestern Michigan have been involved in bringing the dream of our new medical school to life. Many of you are here today. On behalf of the WMU School of Medicine Board of Directors, I thank you all for your continued support and commitment to help us realize our potential to improve the health of our community. This could not happen without you.

Hal Jenson, MD remarks:

Thank you, President Dunn. The dream of a new medical school in Kalamazoo is definitely coming to life. I want to take this opportunity to provide a brief update on our progress. It has been my pleasure to get to know and work closely with the 300 plus faculty and staff members from the former Kalamazoo Center for Medical Studies. With the merger into the medical school in 2012, these experienced clinicians, educators and administrators are the heart and soul of the new WMU School of Medicine. They are being joined by many physicians and others at Borgess and Bronson and throughout our community and southwest Michigan. I want to thank all of them for their hard work, commitment and dedication to making this medical school a success. We
continue the commitment to clinical care and residency education that has been the cornerstone of medical education in Kalamazoo for decades. Our residents are fully prepared for the next step in their professional career, whether pursuing fellowship training or entering practice. Just two months ago our medical student applications opened. We have received almost 3000 student applications from outstanding students with a pioneering spirit from which we will select 50 who have the opportunity to make history as our inaugural class. Our employed faculty has grown to more than 80 with the recruitment of additional clinical and basic science expertise. Later this month many more physicians, other healthcare providers, and community members will begin the process for medical school faculty appointment to participate in teaching the next generation of physicians. We continue to finalize the medical school curriculum that uses contemporary technologies, simulation training, and instructional strategies focused on problem-solving in a team-oriented inter-professional learning environment. Our graduates will be prepared to excel in any chosen specialty.

It is now my pleasure to tell you more about our celebration today … our Topping Out Ceremony. No one seems to know exactly when or how it started, but the tradition of ‘topping out’ has become a cherished custom whenever the steel skeleton of a building is completed. Topping out is a signal that the uppermost steel member is going into place, that the structure has reached its height. As our beam is hoisted today, an evergreen tree, the US flag and our medical school banner are attached to it as it ascends. The evergreen is a symbol of good luck for the future building occupants. We will plant this tree in the future landscape on the campus. The US flag symbolizes our commitment to the American dream, which as an educational institution we believe can be achieved through a commitment to lifelong learning. And, the WMU School of Medicine banner demonstrates our institutional pride. I want to thank you for signing the steel beam, which demonstrates your support and commitment to building the future of medical education in Kalamazoo. This facility will be the inaugural home to a pioneering class of students, faculty and staff and remain relevant to the future generations that will follow in their footsteps.

Now I will ask the crane operator to hoist the beam.

Please join me in a round of applause to thank the construction crew members for their hard work in bringing the future home of the medical school to life. I also want to thank the community leaders, area physicians and our donors for their advocacy, leadership and support. Without all of you, this would not be possible. We’ve come this far very quickly because of the generosity of many people in this community and the region. Your continued support will ensure this medical school reflects the caliber of this community. On behalf of the WMU School of Medicine Board of Directors, thank you for joining us today and for your continued support and engagement.