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CONTACT: Bonnie Reuben (310) 248-3852
Bonnie@BonnieReuben.com

THOUSANDS VISIT NEW YORK EACH YEAR FOR URGENT MEDICAL CARE

ITM Hospitality Fund Provides Lodging for Neediest Patients and Their Families

NEW YORK, NY – New York City is, of course, renowned as a travel destination for shoppers and sightseers, theatergoers and business executives. But a significant number of visitors to Manhattan come here for a different reason: to receive urgent medical care. Home to many of the world's top medical facilities, a center for breakthrough therapies, New York is a leading destination for healthcare-related travel. Thousands of critically ill people, and their loved ones, journey here each year for treatment that is often life-saving.

Two such "medical travelers" are a couple in their mid-40s, Duane and Kim S., farmers from western Minnesota. Together, they have made over 40 trips to New York City over two years so that he could receive treatment for peritoneal mesothelioma (asbestos cancer) from Dr. Robert Taub at NY Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia Medical Center, one of the leading mesothelioma specialists in the country (Duane and Kim drive 3 ½ hours from their residence to Minneapolis Airport, before flying to New York to see Dr. Taub).

However, with New York City's hotel costs among the world's highest, many healthcare travelers and their families find it overwhelmingly difficult to secure convenient, affordable accommodations here. The costs of New York City lodging, added to transportation and out-of-pocket medical expenses, have literally bankrupted some families.

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A Solution for Those in Need

Recognizing the difficulties facing needy medical travelers – many of whom are traveling far from home for the first time in their lives - a New Jersey-based businesswoman, Jody Merl, created the ITM Hospitality Fund, a program that provides free accommodations, convenient to treatment facilities, for patients and families of limited means. Merl, the president of Innovative Travel Marketing (ITM), a local hotel and travel barter company, established the ITM Hospitality Fund with a donation of rooms from ITM's barter hotel inventory. With the assistance of co-founder Michael Stoler, a local executive and health care philanthropist, the Fund was launched in February 2002. Working in partnership with more than a dozen hospitals, medical centers and medical societies in the New York Metro area, the ITM Hospitality Fund is the only citywide program of its kind in the United States.

The Mosers are among the 300 people to date who have been helped by the ITM Hospitality Fund. After being referred to the program through their physician ,Dr. Taub, the couple received a free hotel room during their last trip to New York. Here are a just a few of the program's other success stories:

- *An 80-year-old woman having eye surgery at a New York City hospital needed a room close by for her visually impaired husband. The Fund provided lodging for two nights.*
- *The family of a 10-year-old boy from the Midwest, diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor, discovered that NYU's Hassenfeld Children's*

Center is the only US medical facility where an experimental protocol exists for his condition. During the course of treatment, lodging was provided for the boy, his parents, and his brother and sister.

- *A 38-year-old single mother of two had severe metastatic breast cancer and required a specialized protocol of experimental chemotherapy. The debilitating treatment made it difficult for her to travel each day to and from her home on eastern Long Island. With accommodations provided by the Fund, she was able to remain in New York City with her children during the remainder of treatment.*

Presence of Loved Ones Eases Trauma

Research shows that patients fare better when loved ones are in close proximity during treatment and recovery. Having family nearby eases the stress and trauma of this difficult time. By making first-class hotel rooms available to those who could otherwise not afford them, the ITM Hospitality Fund reduces expense, makes travel to New York less daunting, and encourages the presence of a patient's family at a time when they are needed the most.

The presence of loved ones is also powerfully comforting for terminally ill patients at the end of their lives. Another beneficiary of the ITM Hospitality Fund, a 28-year-old father of three with inoperable brain cancer, was placed in a hospice in Manhattan. With lodging provided by the Fund, his family was able to share his last days with him.

Patients are referred to the program by participating medical facilities,

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including institutions such as NYU Medical Center, Memorial Sloan Kettering - Cancer Center, New York-Presbyterian Hospital, Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine, Mt. Sinai Medical Center, Lenox Hill Hospital, St. Vincent's Hospital and Medical Center, Manhattan Eye & Ear, among others. Those eligible for the program's benefits are chosen based primarily on financial need. The only costs to beneficiaries are New York State and City taxes for the hotel room.

"New York City is truly a medical capital," says Fund co-founder Michael Stoler. "As the city remains at the forefront of healthcare therapy, there will be an ongoing need to help those who come here for urgent care."

Another contributing factor to the burgeoning medical travel market is the increased use of the Internet as a source of medical information. With an estimated 110 million Americans now regularly logging on for healthcare information¹, patients and their families, more than ever before, are using the Web as a tool to locate specialists that offer potentially life-saving therapies.

"We pamper families who are in a very fragile state with the convenience and comfort of hotel rooms in their time of need," adds Jody Merl. "We feel blessed to be able to make a difference in the lives of these patients and their loved ones." For more information, visit www.itmhospitalityfund.com, e-mail: info@itmhospitalityfund.com, or call (973) 331-8171, ext. 12.

¹ Harris Interactive Health Care News, 2002, volume 2