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For Immediate Release

**CAROLINA EAST HEALTH SYSTEM ANNOUNCES SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION OF
EASTERN CAROLINA INTERNAL MEDICINE
40 Year Old Practice Now to Be Known As CarolinaEast Internal Medicine**

NEW BERN, NC – CarolinaEast Health System, as part of its continued commitment to protecting the health of the region by evolving with the changing health care landscape, announces the successful integration of Eastern Carolina Internal Medicine (ECIM) in to the CarolinaEast family of services, effective January 1, 2011.

ECIM, which will become CarolinaEast Internal Medicine following a transition period, employs over 250 physicians and staff. The addition of this staff will bring the Health System to over 2100 employees with a payroll of over \$146 million annually.

Dr. Neil Bender who founded the physician practice in 1971 in his home county of Jones and built it to four offices and a sleep center in three counties is confident this move is in the best interest of the medical community and the practice's 75,000 patients. "When I began this practice four decades ago, I did so to bring quality health care to a very rural and underserved area in our region. This move will ensure that availability will still be possible for many decades to come," said Bender.

"The integration will be seamless for patients. That has been a core goal of this decision making process," said Ray Leggett, President and CEO of CarolinaEast Health System. "We are better together," he added.

The integration and alliance of private physician practices is a national trend driven by increased regulations and declining government insurance reimbursement making efficient practice operations increasingly difficult. The Governance Institute, a national organization providing research and planning resources for hospitals, health systems and boards, supports moves such as the integration of ECIM into the CarolinaEast system. "The days of loose cooperation—and sometimes competition—between hospitals and their medical staff members in private practice are quickly coming

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to an end. Only hospitals that are tightly aligned or integrated with a critical mass of physicians will be able to organize their delivery system to meet payer/consumer demands for price, quality, efficiency, and community service. Hospitals that lack a strong relationship with a group of aligned doctors will not survive on their own.”

This most recent alliance brings physician practices operating as part of the Health System to eight. “We began integrating physician practices in 1993 when we brought the Vanceboro Medical Center, now CarolinaEast Primary Care, on board,” explained Leggett. The past two years have seen the addition of CarolinaEast Heart Center, CarolinaEast Urology Center, CarolinaEast Hospitalists, Surgicalists, and Orthopedic Hospitalists. Beyond the CarolinaEast Medical Center campus, the system now operates nine physician offices in four counties.

“We recognize the multitude of changes in the current and future health care environment can be confusing and concerning to those we serve,” said Leggett, “but I assure you every decision we are making is done so with the wellbeing of our patients and community at the forefront of any discussions.”

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