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CONTACT: Larry Tye

(617) 823-5386

larrytye@aol.com

Health Coverage Fellowship Chooses Class for 2006

BOSTON – Ten medical journalists from across New England today are being named to the 2006 class of the Health Coverage Fellowship.

The fellowship, the first of its kind in the country, is designed to help the New England media do a better job covering critical health care issues. It does that by bringing in as speakers more than 50 top health officials, policy people, and researchers. It also brings the fellows out to watch first-hand how the system works, from walking the streets at night with mental health case workers to riding a Medflight helicopter.

The program, now entering its fifth year, is sponsored by the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation, with help from the Maine Health Access Foundation, Connecticut Health Foundation, Jane's Trust, New Hampshire's Endowment for Health, Vermont Community Foundation, Ottawaquechee Health Foundation in Vermont, and other philanthropies. For its first two years, eligibility was limited to journalists from newspapers, radio stations and TV outlets in Massachusetts; in 2004 the fellowship expanded to include reporters and editors from New Hampshire and Maine, in 2005 it added Vermont and Connecticut, and next spring it will include all six New England states.

The program will run for nine days, beginning April 28. It is housed at Babson College's Center for Executive Education in Wellesley, and is operated in collaboration with the region's leading journalism organizations. Larry Tye, who covered medicine and health at the *Boston Globe* for 15 years, directs the program. A former Nieman Fellow, Tye has taught journalism at Boston University, Northeastern, Tufts and Harvard.

The 2006 class includes Catherine Arnst of *Business Week*, Nancy Cook of the *Standard-Times* in New Bedford, Felice Freyer of the *Providence Journal*, Bob Kievra of the *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*, Bob Kinzel of *Vermont Public Radio*, Melanie Lauwers of the *Cape Cod Times*, Gillian Neff of *News 12 Connecticut*, Christopher Rowland of the *Boston Globe*, Anne Ruderman of the *Concord Monitor*, and Tom Walsh of Maine's *Ellsworth-American*.

The fellowship will focus on a series of pressing health care issues, from insuring the uninsured to the plight of community hospitals, backups in emergency rooms, and the ongoing nursing shortage. Attention also will be given to public health scares, from understanding the deadly powers of new illnesses like the avian flu to knowing the capabilities – and limits – of public health authorities who respond to terrorism and disease outbreaks.

And the teaching does not end when the fellows head back to their stations or papers. Tye, the program director, will be on call for fellows for the full year following their nine days in Wellesley. He will help when they are stuck for ideas, or for whom to call on a story. He will assist in thinking out projects and carving out clearer definitions of beats. He also maintains a web site where fellows post their stories.

The program is operated with help from a steering committee that includes George Donnelly, editor of the *Boston Business Journal*; Sam Fleming, News Director at *WBUR-FM*; Brenda L. Reed, Executive Director of the New England Press Association; Terry L. Schraeder, M.D., the former medical reporter at *WCVB-TV* in Boston; and B. Allan Sprague, President of the Massachusetts Broadcasters Association.