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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW PROGRAM TO PROTECT NURSING HOME RESIDENTS

*CalOptima, UC Irvine, Orange County Health Care Agency
partner on COVID-19 infection control training*

ORANGE, Calif. (May 8, 2020) — To combat the spread of COVID-19 in nursing homes, CalOptima’s Board of Directors committed more than \$629,000 in a grant for a new program that improves infection control training. The Orange County Nursing Home COVID-19 Prevention Team program is a collaborative effort by UC Irvine, the Orange County Health Care Agency (HCA) and CalOptima.

CalOptima’s contracted nursing homes are eligible to participate in the program, which was developed by UCI’s Susan Huang, M.D., MPH, professor in the Division of Infectious Diseases and medical director of the UCI Health Epidemiology and Infection Prevention program. Her team of researchers and clinicians will: 1) develop a toolkit and implement a training program for infection prevention at 67 nursing homes, 2) engage 12 nursing homes for more intensive infection prevention training, with detailed metrics and video-assisted support with feedback, and 3) use molecular and serology testing in nursing homes to assess disease and immunity trends, and measure the training program’s impact.

“Nursing home residents need our urgent coalition of support due to their high risk for infection from COVID-19,” said CalOptima Deputy Chief Medical Officer Emily Fonda, M.D., MMM, CHCQM. “This program will teach the changes in care techniques that are needed in the presence of a highly contagious virus, so Orange County nursing home staff can protect their vulnerable residents.”

For example, as part of the toolkit and training, nursing home staff will learn how to better screen facility visitors, use personal protective equipment (PPE) more effectively, correct common mistakes in cleaning rooms and public areas, and answer resident questions about COVID-19. Dr. Huang said: “It’s a privilege to provide infection prevention support for Orange County nursing homes at this critical time when protecting staff and residents is of paramount importance.”

On May 1, HCA also committed similar financial support to the Orange County Nursing Home COVID-19 Prevention Team program, with assistance from Matt Zahn, M.D., medical director of HCA’s Communicable Disease Control Division, who worked in partnership with UCI and CalOptima.

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The new COVID-19 program will operate concurrently with other infection control efforts by HCA and CalOptima. HCA's public health team responds with a targeted intervention when a cluster of COVID-19 cases is identified in a nursing home. Separately, CalOptima's Post-Acute Infection Prevention Quality Initiative (PIPQI) reduces the impact of multi-drug resistant organisms, such as MRSA, among nursing home residents. PIPQI provides financial incentives for using specialized Chlorhexidine soap to care for residents in a proven protocol that reduces infection rates and hospital admissions. PIPQI stemmed from Dr. Huang's landmark research in conjunction with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About 25 Orange County nursing homes have PIPQI in place, and there are plans to expand participation. Dr. Fonda added, "It's also important to note that Chlorhexidine is very effective against coronaviruses."

"Innovation in the fight against COVID-19 is greatly needed, and CalOptima's participation in this new program for nursing homes reflects our commitment to quality programs for seniors and collaboration with community partners," said Richard Sanchez, CalOptima Interim CEO.

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About CalOptima

A county organized health system, CalOptima provides publicly funded health care coverage for low-income children, adults, seniors and people with disabilities in Orange County, California. CalOptima's mission is to provide members with access to quality health care services delivered in a cost-effective and compassionate manner. In total, CalOptima serves more than 729,000 members with a network of more than 8,000 primary care doctors and specialists, as well as 40 hospitals.