

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Beth-Ann Kerber
kerberbe@rwjms.rutgers.edu

Rutgers Names Dr. Vikas Dharnidharka, Nationally Recognized Leader in Nephrology, Pediatrics and Transplantation, as New Chair of Pediatrics
Will Serve as Physician-in-Chief of The Bristol-Myers Squibb Children's Hospital

New Brunswick, NJ—Dr. Vikas Dharnidharka, a board-certified pediatric nephrologist and transplant specialist recognized nationally and internationally for his clinical expertise and clinical and translational research, will join Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School as Henry Rutgers Professor and chair of the Department of Pediatrics. Dr. Dharnidharka also will serve as physician-in-chief of The Bristol-Myers Squibb Children's Hospital (BMSCH) at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, an RWJBarnabas Health facility.

He joins Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, from Washington University in St. Louis School of Medicine and St. Louis Children's Hospital, where he served as the Alexis F. Hartmann Sr., MD Endowed Professor of Pediatrics, vice chair for clinical investigation in the Department of Pediatrics, and professor and chief of its Division of Pediatric Nephrology, Hypertension and Apheresis. For the past two years, he has co-lead the NIH-funded Washington University Pediatric Center of Excellence in Nephrology.

"Dr. Dharnidharka is a nationally recognized leader in nephrology, pediatrics and transplantation, and we are thrilled to welcome him as our new chair of the Department of Pediatrics," said Amy P. Murtha, MD, dean of Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. "His dedication to advancing healthcare through seminal research and superior clinical care will be invaluable to our community and the broader field."

Dr. Dharnidharka shared his excitement about the opportunities his new roles provide, noting, "Rutgers Health, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and RWJBarnabas Health have been in the midst of an amazing transformation to create a powerhouse academic health system for the state of New Jersey and beyond. With the visionary system leadership already in place, the potential to make a difference is so great!

"I am honored to have the opportunity to direct the RWJMS Pediatrics Department to be the academic flagship; we want to be among the very best nationally. I also look forward to working with the team at The Bristol-Myers Squibb Children's Hospital and RWJBarnabas Health leadership to help advance children's healthcare throughout all our health system locations across the state," he added.

"The Children's Health network of RWJBarnabas Health looks forward to building upon the strong partnerships that exist with Rutgers and collaborating with Dr. Dharnidharka to advance pediatric care and access at the nationally ranked The Bristol-Myers Squibb Children's Hospital," said Fernando Ferrer, MD, chief pediatric officer, RWJBarnabas Health. "As the new physician-in-chief at BMSCH, Dr. Dharnidharka's world-renowned expertise in research and pediatric nephrology, and transplantation, will help lead the extraordinary team of physicians, nurses, and other care providers at BMSCH, to further develop research and innovation opportunities to address complex medical conditions and childhood wellness for children and their families."

"If you look at the sum total of all the areas pediatrics touches and components that touch pediatrics—the Rutgers Cancer Institute, the Child Health Institute of New Jersey, BMSCH, the Pediatric Clinical Research

--more--

Center—all of these are really exciting partners and provide a great opportunity to enhance and expand pediatric services and help improve children’s healthcare across the state,” Dr. Dharnidharka said. “I’m looking forward to working with the dean and all the leaders across these institutions. We want to be a proud partner in elevating the stature of these programs and be an integral part of the exciting transformation that’s occurring across the board.”

In his previous institutions, Dr. Dharnidharka has played a role in transforming the divisions’ clinical, research, and educational activities, from expanded clinical services and programs, to increases in research funding and publications—all while earning strong educational ratings from its pediatric residents. This balanced approach is a great complement to the medical school’s varied core missions.

In his clinical practice, he provides highly specialized care to children and young adults with all types of kidney disease, with a particular focus on end-stage renal disease and kidney transplantation. He is frequently consulted internationally to advise with difficult complications of solid organ transplantation such as post-transplant lymphoproliferative disorders (PTLD) and infections from Epstein-Barr or BK virus (a polyomavirus) nephrology.

A noted researcher whose work has been consistently funded by the National Institutes of Health for the past two decades, Dr. Dharnidharka has led studies resulting in numerous novel observations on risk factors for BK polyoma virus nephropathy and biomarkers in acute and chronic organ rejection after transplantation. His work has contributed to advances in the understanding of the incidence, risk factors for, and outcomes after PTLD, as well as knowledge of the complications of over-immunosuppression after organ transplantation.

His current research, which relates to adult and pediatric populations, focuses on three different areas related to infections and cancers following organ transplants. One group is studying metagenomic sequencing of different DNA viruses from PTLD-related tissues. Another is analyzing blood samples post-transplant to determine how the body’s immune system responds to the virus, which patients have a good response versus those who don’t, and which individuals are most likely to get PTLD. The third is involved in large database integration to develop artificial intelligence models that explore how the immunosuppressive medications given post-transplant will impact 10 different clinical outcomes, “trying to get a personalized choice for those patients for the outcomes that are most important to them,” Dr. Dharnidharka explained.

An author of hundreds of peer-reviewed articles and 21 book chapters, he is also the lead editor of both editions of the only book on post-transplant lymphoproliferative disorders.

Dr. Dharnidharka’s numerous awards and recognition include achievement awards from the American Society of Transplantation, the National Kidney Foundation of Eastern Missouri, Arkansas and Southern Illinois’ Award of Excellence, the American Nephrologists of Indian Origin’s Academic Excellence Lifetime Achievement Award, and, most recently, Washington University Dean’s Impact Award in recognition of his sponsorship and mentorship. He currently serves on the Governing Council for the International Pediatric Transplant Association, is past chair of the Section of Nephrology within the American Academy of Pediatrics, and recently completed a four-year term on the Governing Council for the American Society of Pediatric Nephrology.

Dr. Dharnidharka received his medical degree from Topiwala National Medical College, Bombay University, in India, a master’s in public health with a concentration in biostatistics from the University of Florida College of Public Health, and an Advanced Postgraduate Program in Clinical Investigation, also at the University of

Florida. He completed pediatric residency training at BYL Nair Hospital and Topiwala National Medical College, and subsequently at the Children's Hospital of Michigan and Wayne State University, with fellowship training in pediatric nephrology at Children's Hospital (Boston) and Harvard Medical School.

Dr. Dharnidharka will join Rutgers and RWJUH in October.

--#--