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**EXCELA HEALTH CO-WORKERS SPEAK FOR AUTISM
BECAUSE THEIR SONS CANNOT**

GREENSBURG, PA, May 11, 2012 ... Rebecca Quel and Renee Varney speak for autism, giving voice to their sons, all under the age of 10, who benefit from mother love and advocacy.

Family physician Dr. Quel is a hospitalist at Excelsa Latrobe Hospital as part of the Excelsa Health Physician Practices (EHPP). Varney is an accounting clerk for EHPP. Annually, both women and their families participate in community walks to raise funds and awareness for autism, now considered an epidemic in the United States with 1 in 88 boys and 1 in 250 girls diagnosed in the spectrum, affecting more than 1 million children and their families.

Excelsa Health is a sponsor of the Laurel Highlands Walk Now for Autism Speaks at Idlewild Park and Soak Zone. A member of the planning committee for the May 20 event, Dr. Quel also will support the event with proceeds of a Chinese Auction May 16 and 17 in the Little Shop Corridor at Latrobe Hospital.

All three of Dr. Quel's children are autistic, and none of her boys, ages 10, 6 and 4, is verbal. "Beyond the prevalence of 4 males to 1 female having autism, the incidence increases within the family," she said. "If the first child has autism, the likelihood is greater among successive children."

A 2005 graduate of Excelsa Latrobe Hospital's Family Medicine Residency Program, Dr. Quel is not unlike her patients when facing a new diagnosis. "First I was a parent in denial, then, as a doctor, I wanted to know how I could fix it."

Part of the remedy is Northwestern Human Services private school where her older boys are enrolled and in-home therapy for her youngest. Technology is another tool to success. Dr. Quel smiles as she describes her middle son as a

“techie” who functions well using an iPad. And while each has individual struggles, the siblings behave like typical brothers, fighting one minute and playing the next.

“Given my situation, I can be an advocate in the hospital and help other clinicians with patients who are dealing with autism,” she said.

Their experiences as a family also will prove beneficial to a wider community. Dr. Quel’s husband, David, is attending Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, with hopes of ministering to families with special needs.

Varney’s 8-year-old son, Noah, was diagnosed in the spectrum at age 28 months, although early intervention services had begun six months prior. At age 3, he was transitioned to wrap-around therapy which consisted of 24 hours per week of in-home therapy. “We also did outpatient speech and occupational therapy through Excela Health,” notes Varney, who gratefully reports her second-grader is part of an autism support classroom at Sheridan Terrace Elementary in the Norwin School District, where he is mainstreamed about two hours each day and also receives school based speech and occupational therapy.

“Noah is verbal and a very loving little boy. While he is high-functioning in many areas, he does struggle with behavior issues. We are very lucky in so many ways, though,” said Varney.

North Huntingdon residents, Varney’s family – husband Jim and 7-year-old daughter Jenna - will attend the Pittsburgh Autism Walk June 9 at Heinz Field. Noah’s school has shared in fund-raising efforts in his honor, and members of his support team are likely walkers.