Nobel Laureate Harold Varmus Joins Weill Cornell Medical College to Advance Cancer Research

Dr. Varmus, Director of the National Cancer Institute, Also to Promote Cancer Genomics at the New York Genome Center

New York (March 5, 2015) — Dr. Harold Varmus, director of the National Cancer Institute (NCI) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and co-winner of the Nobel Prize, will join Weill Cornell Medical College’s faculty as the Lewis Thomas University Professor of Medicine, effective April 1. In conjunction with his appointment at Weill Cornell, Dr. Varmus, internationally recognized for his research on retroviruses and the genetic basis of cancer, will team up with the New York Genome Center (NYGC) as a Senior Associate Core Member to promote the use of cancer genomics throughout the New York region.

In his new position at Weill Cornell, Dr. Varmus will continue to conduct research on fundamental aspects of cancer, in collaboration with investigators at the Sandra and Edward Meyer Cancer Center, led by Meyer Director Lewis C. Cantley. By working with the NYGC, Dr. Varmus will strive to amplify work on cancer genomes and its application to cancer care through its consortium of member institutions.

“This is a remarkable time in cancer research,” Dr. Varmus said. “Technological advances have enabled scientists to conduct comprehensive genomic studies that are revealing detailed portraits of cancer cells, sparking new opportunities to develop next-generation therapies, diagnostics and prevention strategies. I’m excited to join Weill Cornell Medical College and the New York Genome Center as we strive to reduce the burden of cancer and enhance human health in New York and around the world.”
Dr. Varmus will also serve as a senior advisor to Dr. Laurie H. Glimcher, the Stephen and Suzanne Weiss Dean of Weill Cornell and provost for medical affairs for Cornell University, and will have an appointment in the Weill Cornell Graduate School of Medical Sciences.

Appointed by President Barack Obama, Dr. Varmus began his tenure as director of the National Cancer Institute in July 2010. He previously served as president and chief executive officer of Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center from 2000 to 2010, as well as director of the National Institutes of Health from 1993 to the end of 1999.

“As one of the world’s leading cancer geneticists, Dr. Varmus, a physician, has dedicated his career to driving excellence in cancer research by investigating the underlying mechanisms that cause these diseases,” Dr. Glimcher said. “We are delighted and honored that Dr. Varmus, an esteemed leader, scientific pioneer and champion of cancer research, will continue this distinguished and vital work at Weill Cornell, catalyzing groundbreaking discoveries into improved patient care.”

“Having Dr. Varmus on our team is a significant step forward for the New York Genome Center,” said Robert B. Darnell, President, CEO and Scientific Director of NYGC. “His decades of experience as a cancer researcher running complex organizations will allow us to create a collaborative resource that will improve cancer treatment for patients in New York City and beyond.”

Dr. Varmus’ laboratory, which will be housed in the Belfer Research Building, will continue to focus on lung adenocarcinoma and the cancer-driving mutations found in that disease. Those mutations affect cell signaling, cell growth and processing of RNA. In his seminal work, conducted during 23 years as a faculty member at the University of California San Francisco Medical School, Dr. Varmus, his collaborator Dr. J. Michael Bishop and their colleagues demonstrated the cellular origin of the oncogene of a chicken retrovirus. Their discovery led to the isolation of many cellular genes that normally control growth and development and are frequently mutated in human cancer. Drs. Varmus and Bishop were awarded the 1989 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine and numerous other accolades for this discovery. Dr. Varmus is also renowned for his studies on the replication cycles of retroviruses and hepatitis B viruses, the functions of genes implicated in cancer and the development of mouse models of human cancer.
During his tenure at the National Cancer Institute, Dr. Varmus initiated a reorganization of its clinical trial activities and promoted the use of precision medicine, harnessing each tumor’s genetic profile to individualize treatment. He also helped to guide The Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA), an NCI and National Human Genome Research Institute-supported program that has identified genomic changes in more than 20 different types of human cancer, and established new Centers for Global Health and Cancer Genomics.

### About Dr. Harold Varmus

Dr. Varmus is a member of the National Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Medicine, and is involved with several initiatives to promote science and health in developing countries. He is the author of more than 350 scientific papers and five books, including the 2009 memoir “The Art and Politics of Science.” He was co-chair of President Barack Obama’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology and served on the World Health Organization’s Commission on Macroeconomics and Health. Dr. Varmus was co-founder and chairman of the board of the Public Library of Science and chair of the scientific board of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Grand Challenges in Global Health. He was also a member of the Empire State Stem Cell Board’s Funding Committee.

In addition to the Nobel Prize, Dr. Varmus has received numerous accolades, including the National Medal of Science and the Vannevar Bush Award.

Dr. Varmus received a bachelor’s degree in English literature from Amherst College, a master’s in English from Harvard University and his medical degree from Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. During his medical training, Dr. Varmus worked as a medical student in a hospital in India, later joining NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center’s medical house staff. He began his scientific training as a public health service officer at the National Institutes of Health, where he studied bacterial gene expression with Dr. Ira Pastan, and then trained as a postdoctoral fellow with Dr. Bishop at UCSF. In 1993, Dr. Varmus was named by President Bill Clinton to serve as director of the NIH, a position he held until 1999. After his tenure at the NIH, Dr. Varmus joined Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center as

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president and CEO. Under his leadership, Sloan Kettering forged new graduate programs in cancer biology at its Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, as well as in chemical biology and computational biology for the Tri-Institutional Research Program — a collaboration between Weill Cornell, Sloan Kettering and The Rockefeller University — and greatly expanded its research faculty, many of whom work in the Mortimer B. Zuckerman Research Center, also constructed during Dr. Varmus’ tenure.

**About the New York Genome Center**

The New York Genome Center (NYGC) is an independent, nonprofit at the forefront of transforming biomedical research and clinical care with the mission of saving lives. As a consortium of renowned academic, medical and industry leaders across the globe, NYGC focuses on translating genomic research into clinical solutions for serious disease. Our member organizations and partners are united in this unprecedented collaboration of technology, science, and medicine. We harness the power of innovation and discoveries to improve people’s lives - ethically, equitably, and urgently. Member institutions include: Albert Einstein College of Medicine, American Museum of Natural History, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, Cornell University/Weill Cornell Medical College, Hospital for Special Surgery, The Jackson Laboratory, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, The New York Stem Cell Foundation, New York University, North Shore-LIJ, The Rockefeller University, Roswell Park Cancer Institute, Stony Brook University and IBM. For more information, visit: www.nygenome.org.

**Weill Cornell Medical College**

Weill Cornell Medical College, Cornell University’s medical school located in New York City, is committed to excellence in research, teaching, patient care and the advancement of the art and science of medicine, locally, nationally and globally. Physicians and scientists of Weill Cornell Medical College are engaged in cutting-edge research from bench to bedside aimed at unlocking mysteries of the human body in health and sickness and toward developing new treatments and prevention strategies. In its commitment to global health and education, Weill Cornell has a strong presence in places such as Qatar, Tanzania, Haiti, Brazil, Austria and Turkey. Through the historic Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar, the Medical College is the first in the U.S. to offer its M.D. degree overseas. Weill Cornell is the birthplace of many medical advances — including the development of the Pap test for cervical cancer, the synthesis of penicillin, the first successful embryo-biopsy pregnancy and birth in the U.S., the first clinical trial of gene therapy for Parkinson’s disease, and most recently, the world’s first successful use of deep brain stimulation to treat a minimally conscious brain-injured patient. Weill Cornell Medical College is affiliated with NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, where its faculty provides comprehensive patient care at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell
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Medical Center. The Medical College is also affiliated with Houston Methodist. For more information, visit weill.cornell.edu.

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