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Media Advisory

USU's Alison O'Brien Appointed to Lead Biodefense Research Consortium

Bethesda, Md. – Alison O'Brien, Ph.D., an internationally recognized microbiologist and chair of the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU) has been named Co-Principal Investigator for the Middle Atlantic Regional Centers of Excellence (MARCE).

Dr. O'Brien will assume her duties as Co-Principal Investigator in June, and will work with Myron Levine, M.D., D.T.P.H., University of Maryland, Baltimore, to lead a consortium of 18 institutions, including USU, that are collaborating to develop and maintain a strong infrastructure and to support multifaceted research and development activities that will provide the scientific information leading to the next generation of therapeutics, vaccines and diagnostics against National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) Category A, B and C priority pathogens. These pathogens include micro-organisms responsible for diseases such as anthrax, smallpox and the plague. The MARCE is one of 10 such centers throughout the country established by the NIAID Biodefense Network for biodefense and emerging infectious diseases research.

Dr. O'Brien is a world-renowned expert in bacterial toxins and microbial pathogenesis. She has over 170 publications and has been continuously funded by NIAID for her work on the "hamburger bug," *Escherichia coli* O157:H7, for the past 23 years. She has served as the Editor-in-Chief of the American Society for Microbiology journal, *Infection and Immunity*, since 1999 and is the current President of the Association of Medical Microbiology and Immunology Chairs. Her previous honors include membership on advisory panels for the NIAID, the FDA, and the USDA.

In addition to USU, other institutions participating in the MARCE initiative include the University of Maryland, Baltimore, University of Maryland Biotechnical Institute, Blood Systems Research Institute, Drexel University, the Food and Drug Administration, George Washington University, Georgetown University, Johns Hopkins University, Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, University of Missouri Kansas City, University of Pennsylvania, University of Pittsburgh, University of Vermont, University of Virginia, Virginia Bioinformatics Institute, Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and West Virginia University.

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USU, which is located on the grounds of the National Naval Medical Center, is the nation's federal school of medicine and graduate school of nursing. The students are active-duty uniformed officers in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Public Health Service who are being educated to deal with wartime casualties, national disasters, emerging infectious diseases and other public health emergencies. Many of the university's graduates are currently serving in Iraq or Afghanistan.

For more information, call the Office of External Affairs at (301) 295-3166.

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