



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 8, 2003

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STAR NOAH WYLE TO SERVE AS NATIONAL SPOKESPERSON FOR COVER THE UNINSURED WEEK

Editor: Electronic photo of Noah Wyle available at www.CoverTheUninsuredWeek.org

WASHINGTON, DC – Dec. 8, 2003 – Noah Wyle, star of the top-rated television drama “ER,” will serve as the national spokesperson for *Cover the Uninsured Week 2004*, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation announced today. Co-chaired by former Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, *Cover the Uninsured Week* will focus the nation’s attention on the plight of the nearly 44 million Americans who go without health care coverage of any kind. Through community events in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, thousands of doctors, nurses, business owners, religious leaders, educators, union members and others will express their concern about the sharply growing number of uninsured Americans, who often go without needed medical care. Many local events will provide community members with opportunities to get involved.

Cover the Uninsured Week 2004, which will take place from May 10-16, 2004, is organized by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and an ideologically diverse group of national and local organizations. The week promises to be the largest mobilization in history to promote the goal of health coverage for all Americans.

Wyle, part of the original “ER” cast, plays the role of Dr. John Carter on the award-winning NBC series. Since the show began nearly 10 years ago, Wyle has been recognized with five Emmy Award and three Golden Globe nominations. As the national spokesperson for the initiative, Wyle will speak at national and community events and participate in public service announcements, among other activities.

“Tens of millions of Americans, most of them working, do not have health coverage of any kind. Most of them put off going to the doctor when they need to, just because they can’t afford the care that the rest of us take for granted,” said Wyle. “I’ve spent the last decade playing the role of a doctor on a program that depicts the plight of uninsured people who arrive in a Chicago emergency room, seeking medical care they can find nowhere else. These stories have had a profound effect on me, and I am proud to join former Presidents Ford and Carter in this effort to let all Americans know that they can make a difference. Too many Americans are at risk for finding themselves uninsured, so *Cover the Uninsured Week* is for everyone, not just those who are currently uninsured.”

According to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau estimates, nearly 44 million Americans, including 8.5 million children, have no health care coverage. The number of people without health coverage increased by more than two million last year, the largest one-year increase in a decade. With health care costs climbing rapidly, employers and working Americans are finding it harder to afford health care coverage. Government statistics show that eight out of 10 people who are uninsured are in working families.

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“Noah Wyle understands that the struggles portrayed weekly on “ER” are inspired by the dramas that unfold daily in American hospitals,” said C. Everett Koop, M.D., former Surgeon General of the United States and a supporter of *Cover the Uninsured Week*. “Every day, in ERs from coast to coast, physicians and nurses see uninsured patients who have put off life-saving care because they cannot afford it. Unfortunately, the cost of delaying care is often devastating to their health and sometimes fatal.”

Along with Dr. Koop, a group of former U.S. Surgeons General and former U.S. Secretaries of Health and Human Services from Republican and Democratic administrations have pledged their support to *Cover the Uninsured Week*. The non-partisan initiative aims to make the issue of the uninsured – and solutions to the problem – a central part of the national discussion. *Cover the Uninsured Week* is supported by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the California Endowment, the Missouri Foundation for Health, the United Hospital Fund of New York and other funders, and more than 800 national and local organizations in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

“Nearly 18,000 Americans die each year because they do not have health coverage, and that amounts to a real-life emergency. That’s why I am gratified that Noah Wyle, who masterfully depicts an ER doctor on one of America’s most popular TV programs, is lending his voice, talent, and passion to this effort,” said Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, M.D., M.B.A., president and CEO of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. “Noah’s character, Dr. Carter, represents American medical idealism at its most inspiring, and Noah is an outstanding example of how a member of the creative community can contribute both on camera and off camera to the health of the nation.”

In the months leading up to *Cover the Uninsured Week*, medical students will organize on-campus “teaching events” about caring for the uninsured. Similarly, thousands of priests, ministers, rabbis, imams and other faith leaders will join in a coordinated multi-faith effort to teach their congregants that health care for all is a moral imperative. During the week, more than 1,000 community events will be organized, including health fairs, educational forums, and workshops for small business owners who are trying to get or keep health coverage for their employees. Many of these events will offer medical screenings for the uninsured, as well as opportunities to enroll eligible uninsured children and adults in the State Children’s Health Insurance Program and Medicaid. *Cover the Uninsured Week* will be bolstered by a major paid national advertising campaign.

The first *Cover the Uninsured Week* was held in March 2003. For more information, log on to www.CoverTheUninsuredWeek.org.

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The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, based in Princeton, N.J., is the nation’s largest philanthropy dedicated exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans.