****

**Media Contact:**

Rachel Yarmolinsky, 646-774-5353

yarmoli@nyspi.columbia.edu

**For Immediate Release**

**New Center for Research on Ethical, Legal and Social Implications of Psychiatric, Neurologic and Behavioral Genetics**

NEW YORK, NY (January 8, 2014) –The Center for Research on the Ethical, Legal and Social Implications of Psychiatric, Neurologic and Behavioral Genetics at Columbia University Medical Center, recently awarded a five-year grant from the National Human Genome Research Institute, unveils its mission today with the launch of a new [website](http://braingenethics.cumc.columbia.edu/). The center, based in the Department of Psychiatry, brings together clinicians and researchers from across the medical center, along with colleagues from the Hastings Center, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research institute that addresses fundamental ethical questions in health, medicine, and the environment.

As understanding of the genetic contributions to psychiatric, neurologic, and behavioral (PNB) traits and disorders advances, the knowledge is being quickly translated into clinical practice. The nature of PNB genetic information, however, raises complex questions about the impact the data will—and should—have in both clinical and non-clinical settings. PNB genetic data speak to many of the characteristics associated with individual identity, as well as to many of humankind’s most feared afflictions. Because of the potential for stigma associated with many PNB disorders, this genetic information may negatively affect how people view themselves and how others view them. Examination of the impact of PNB genetic information in these contexts, and consideration of the implications for normative judgments and public policy are therefore critically needed.

“Scientific findings regarding PNB traits must be discussed with special attention to the human and social context because such traits and disorders—from Alzheimer’s, schizophrenia, and depression to empathy, aggression, and intelligence—can touch our sense of who we are as persons,” said [Erik Parens](http://www.thehastingscenter.org/About/Staff/Detail.aspx?id=1284), PhD, a senior research scholar at the Hastings Center. Parens and [Josephine Johnston](http://www.thehastingscenter.org/About/Staff/Detail.aspx?id=1288), LLB, MBHL, a Hastings Center research scholar and director of research, are core faculty members on new center. “This center is uniquely situated to offer such attention.”

The center will focus on three areas. The first is the impact of PNB genetic information—in both clinical and research contexts—on patients, family members, and clinicians, including effects on causal attributions, treatment choices, health and lifestyle decisions, identity, and self-image. The second area of focus is the impact of PNB genetic information in non-clinical contexts in which it may affect perceptions of autonomy and responsibility for behavior, both in the judicial process and in everyday life. The third area of focus draws on data collected by center researchers and others to suggest how PNB genetic information should influence policy in clinical contexts (e.g., diagnostic and treatment decisions), research contexts (e.g., access to genetic data), and social contexts (e.g., legal rules and health policy).

Advances in PNB genetics affect a wide range of people—patients and families, scientists and clinicians, lawyers and policy makers. The center is committed to engaging all of them in its research and to translating its findings in ways that meet their needs. An annual conference will help to educate professionals and lay people about these issues. To ensure the future of these activities, the center has established a multidisciplinary postdoctoral training program to nurture the next generation of leaders in ethical, legal, and social research in PNB genetics.

“Our center offers the opportunity to advance knowledge of the ethical, legal, and social implications of one of the most rapidly growing areas of genetics. Drawing on our empirical studies and input from key stakeholders, we will develop strategies to guide the use of PNB genetic data in clinical and research settings, as well as in courts, legislatures, and regulatory agencies,” said [Paul Appelbaum](http://asp.cumc.columbia.edu/facdb/profile_list.asp?uni=psa21&DepAffil=Psychiatry), MD, director of the center and of the Division of Law, Ethics and Psychiatry in the Department of Psychiatry at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. “By integrating empirical researchers with experts in ethics, economics, law, and public policy, we hope to point the way toward beneficial use of the latest scientific findings in this exciting new area of genetics.”

####

**The Center for Research on the Ethical, Legal and Social Implications of Psychiatric, Neurologic and Behavioral Genetics** in the Department of Psychiatry at Columbia University Medical Center is a Center for Excellence in ELSI Research funded by a grant from the National Institutes of Health #1P50HG007257-01. For more information, please visit the [center’s website](http://braingenethics.cumc.columbia.edu/).

**Columbia Psychiatry** is ranked among the best departments and psychiatric research facilities in the nation and has contributed greatly to the understanding of and current treatment for psychiatric disorders including depression, suicide, schizophrenia, bipolar and anxiety disorders, and childhood psychiatric disorders. Located at the New York State Psychiatric Institute on the NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center campus in the Washington Heights community of Upper Manhattan, the department enjoys a collaborative relationship with physicians in various disciplines at Columbia University’s College of Physician and Surgeons. For more information please visit <http://columbiapsychiatry.org/>.