

March 22 Episode of *Grey's Anatomy* Features Television's First Fictional Depiction of Rare Disease Fibrodysplasia Ossificans Progressiva, or FOP

WINTER SPRINGS, FLA. – Since premiering in March 2005, *Grey's Anatomy* has explored some of the most dramatic and mysterious elements of the world of medicine – and won several Emmys and hordes of fans along the way. Now the show will step into uncharted television territory.

In its March 22 program, titled "My Favorite Mistake," the top-rated program will feature a character named Cathy Rogerson who has FOP. Cathy experiences acute pain in her abdomen and visits Seattle Grace, the show's resident hospital, for help. While there, she learns she's bleeding internally. Typically doctors perform a straightforward surgery to mend the problem, but because she has FOP, surgery isn't an option. As a result, the show's physicians spend much of the episode seeking a solution to the situation.

The character of Cathy Rogerson represents the first fictional depiction of FOP on television – a fact the show's writer and producers didn't take lightly.

"We did extensive research to understand the disease process in order to help Chris Van Dusen [the writer of the episode] accurately depict it," said Elizabeth Klaviter, Director of Medical Research for *Grey's Anatomy*. "We are sympathetic that it can be emotionally difficult to watch a fictional account of a disease that has had a personal effect on our lives."

Some of the steps the show took while researching the character of Cathy Rogerson accurately involved talking with the International Fibrodysplasia Ossificans Progressiva Association (IFOPA), the nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting families dealing with the rare genetic condition. The IFOPA put the show's researchers in touch with Frederick S. Kaplan, M.D., Isaac & Rose Nassau Professor of Orthopaedic Molecular Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine and a leading expert in FOP. In April of 2006, Kaplan and his team of scientists announced the discovery of the "Skeleton Key," or FOP gene, the genetic anomaly that causes the disorder Fibrodysplasia Ossificans Progressiva, or FOP. FOP causes bone to form in muscles, tendons, ligaments and other connective tissues, ultimately creating an extra skeleton that immobilizes the joints of the human body. It is estimated that FOP affects about 2,500 people worldwide, or approximately one in two million people.

"This is monumental for us and our members," said Linda Daugherty, Executive Director of the IFOPA. "The show is a very positive PR opportunity. Due to the popularity of the show, millions of viewers will be exposed to FOP, which in turn will bring additional awareness to the disease."

Established in 1988, the IFOPA is a nonprofit support organization for families dealing with FOP. The group's mission is to advance and support FOP research, education and advocacy, while giving its membership a means to help cope with the disease, both privately and publicly. Its membership currently spans 52 countries worldwide and includes FOP patients, as well as families, friends, medical professionals and more. The organization connects and

shares information and ideas with its members through newsletter publications, a website and an online support newsgroup, among other means.

For more information on FOP or the IFOPA, please visit www.ifopa.org.

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Media Contact:

Eyal Goldshmid
Marketing and Communications Manager
International FOP Association
(407) 365-4194
lindaifopa@bellsouth.net
www.ifopa.org