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**Milken Institute SPH Project Will Estimate the Excess Mortality in Puerto Rico Tied to Hurricane Maria**

SAN JUAN and WASHINGTON, DC (February 22, 2018)—At a press conference held in San Juan today the Governor of Puerto Rico announced that a research team at Milken Institute School of Public Health (Milken Institute SPH) at the George Washington University will conduct a study to estimate the excess mortality tied to Hurricane Maria.

Last September, the storm knocked out the power grid, destroyed buildings and injured thousands on the island. Early death counts set the number at 62 but unconfirmed reports estimated the death count to be much higher. To get a more accurate estimate, the Governor of Puerto Rico signed an executive order in January 2018 for a more factual, transparent accounting of the deaths tied to Hurricane Maria.

As part of the study the Milken Institute SPH research team will review and analyze existing records and death certificates and estimate the excess mortality from the time the storm hit on September 20 through February 2018. The excess mortality will be reported as a point estimate and a range of deaths as per standard scientific practice, said Principal Investigator Carlos Santos-Burgoa, MD, MPH, PhD, a professor of global health at Milken Institute SPH.

Santos-Burgoa and his team will also evaluate the current U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines for identifying mortality during such a disaster; look at how well the Puerto Rican government followed those standards and identify areas for potential improvement in order to be more inclusive of the deaths caused by the event and its aftermath.

In addition, the researchers will assess the communication efforts by the government of Puerto Rico before, during and after the hurricane and make recommendations for the future.

In the end, the team will produce a report that the government of Puerto Rico can use to take stock of the disaster and begin to make improvements that will help better prepare the island for the coming hurricane season.
“It is with great responsibility that we take on this independent review as we know that Hurricane Maria has taken a terrible toll on the Puerto Rican people,” said Lynn Goldman, MD, MS, MPH, the Michael and Lori Milken Dean of Milken Institute SPH. “Our hope is that the results of this analysis not only inform and speed the ongoing recovery, but also begin to lay the groundwork for preventing deaths as much as possible in the future.”