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**New-York Historical Society Brings to Life the
Dramatic Story of the Discovery of Insulin, in the Exhibition
Breakthrough, on View October 5, 2010 – January 31, 2011**

**Exhibition commemorates the 90th anniversary of the life-saving drug
through stories including the experience of one New York child**

NEW YORK, NY— Recalling the desperate fight for life that used to be waged by juvenile diabetes patients, and commemorating the events of 1921 that inaugurated a new era of hope for them and their families, the New-York Historical Society will present the exhibition *Breakthrough: The Dramatic Story of the Discovery of Insulin* from October 5, 2010 through January 31, 2011. Exploring the roles of science, government, higher education and industry in developing and distributing a life-saving drug, the exhibition will bring to life the personalities who discovered insulin and raced to bring it to the world and will tell the story of one extraordinary New York girl—Elizabeth Evans Hughes, daughter of the leading statesman and jurist Charles Evans Hughes—who was among the very first patients to be saved.

To lead visitors through this history, from the discovery of insulin in Toronto by Dr. Frederick Banting in 1921 and its first human trials in 1922 to its widespread use today, *Breakthrough* will feature digital interactives, film, artifacts and ephemera drawn from the Historical Society's own collections and from archives including those of the University of Toronto, Eli Lilly and Company, the Rockefeller Institute, the Joslin Clinic and the New York Academy of Medicine.

“The story we tell in *Breakthrough* is international in scope and contemporary in relevance, but it comes into focus through the eyes of New Yorkers, including John D. Rockefeller and the members of the Rockefeller Institute who made sure that insulin would become available to poor sufferers everywhere,” stated Dr. Louise Mirrer, President and CEO of the New-York Historical Society. “We hope visitors to *Breakthrough* will gain a deeper understanding of the nature and treatment of diabetes—

but as historians, we also hope they will learn how the events of 90 years ago still resonate today, and why it makes so much sense to study them from the particular viewpoint of New York.”

According to Jean Ashton, Executive Vice President of the Historical Society and Director of the Library, “The point of departure for organizing this exhibition was the new book by Thea Cooper and Arthur Ainsberg, *Breakthrough*, which casts light on events that took place almost a century ago. But the ramifications of the exhibition reach directly into our lives today. There was a 13.5% rise in the incidence of diabetes in the United States between 2005 and 2007. What we’re exploring here, within an historical context, are issues of lifestyle, private enterprise and public healthcare policy that continue to affect us all.”

Exhibition Overview

Curated by Jean Ashton and Historical Society Chief Curator Stephen Eddin, *Breakthrough* is organized in three chapters.

The first chapter will recount the excitement, and the clash of personalities, among the scientists whose research led to the discovery of insulin, beginning in May 1921. Also included in this chapter will be an account of the valiant but heartbreaking efforts of Dr. Frederick Allen in the years before the discovery to prolong the lives of diabetic children through the use of a starvation diet. The story of Elizabeth Evans Hughes, told in part through actual treatment charts and period letters, will bring to life the impact of insulin when it first became available. Because Elizabeth was the daughter of Charles Evans Hughes—Governor of New York (1907-1910), Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States (1910-1916), United States Secretary of State (1921-1925) and Chief Justice of the United States (1930-1941)—her survival provided powerful testimony to the value of insulin, and helped bring the work of Dr. Allen and Dr. Banting to the world’s stage.

The exhibition’s second chapter will examine how insulin became available for widespread medical use through a partnership between the University of Toronto and Eli Lilly and Company—the first such collaboration between an academic institution and a drug company. Photographs from the Lilly archives will reveal the painstaking early method of manufacturing insulin in mass quantities—an innovative industrial process that ran from the slaughterhouse to the laboratory. Display cases of syringes, vials, testing kits for blood sugar and other equipment will take the story of insulin treatment from the 1920s up through today.

The exhibition’s final chapter will tell about recent developments—notably the synthesis of insulin in the 1980s as the world’s first biotechnology drug—and the current state of research, development, treatment and demography of diabetes. Included in this chapter will be information about the alarming increase in prevalence of Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes in the past decade, and the ways in which individuals, families and institutions can address this health crisis. The exhibition will conclude with a presentation of *Life for a Child*, a documentary film produced by the International Diabetes Federation and Eli Lilly and Company to raise awareness of the devastating impact of the disease.

Breakthrough will be installed in the Historical Society's 1,300-square-foot temporary gallery, located just off the 77th Street entrance, while the remainder of the landmark Central Park West building undergoes a \$60 million architectural renovation.

Related Publication

The Historical Society's presentation of the exhibition will coincide with the publication of *Breakthrough: Elizabeth Hughes, the Discovery of Insulin, and the Making of a Medical Miracle* by Thea Cooper and Arthur Ainsberg, to be published August 31, 2010, by St. Martin's Press. The book narrates the story of Elizabeth Hughes beginning in 1918, when as an 11-year-old she was diagnosed with diabetes—a death sentence in those days—and entered the care of Dr. Frederick Allen, the era's most prominent expert in the disease, who prolonged the lives of Type 1 diabetes patients through a starvation diet. Three years after her initial diagnosis, weighing just 45 pounds, Elizabeth Hughes became one of the first test patients to be treated with insulin. She lived to be 74.

About the New-York Historical Society

The New-York Historical Society, one of America's pre-eminent cultural institutions, is dedicated to fostering research and presenting exhibitions and public programs that reveal the dynamism of history and its influence on the world of today. Founded in 1804, the Society has a mission to explore the richly layered history of New York City and State and the country, and to serve as a national forum for the discussion of issues surrounding the making and meaning of history.

The Society is recognized for engaging the public with deeply researched and far-ranging exhibitions, such as *Alexander Hamilton: The Man Who Made Modern America*; *Slavery in New York*; *Drawn by New York: Six Centuries of Watercolors and Drawings at the New-York Historical Society*; *Grant and Lee in War and Peace*; *Lincoln and New York*; and *The Grateful Dead: Now Playing at the New-York Historical Society*. Supporting these exhibitions and related education programs is one of the world's greatest collections of historical artifacts, works of American art, and other materials documenting the history of the United States and New York.