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October 3, 2023

SORH Short Rows is the quarterly newsletter from the Georgia State Office of Rural Health (SORH) for all matters rural. It provides an update on the progress made to improve rural health in Georgia's hospitals, primary care practices, FQHCs, stakeholders, vendors, health care advocates, and legislators.

Leading the Fight Against Rural Health Disparities

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23 Years and Counting...

The SORH Remains “Here to Serve” Rural Georgia

The State Office of Rural Health (SORH), a division of the Department of Community Health (DCH), was established in 2000 and positioned in Cordele, Ga., to ensure a connection to the rural communities it was created to serve. The office was originally identified as the *Office of Rural Health Services* and was temporarily located in the Crisp County Power Commission building while awaiting completion of renovations to its permanent home. Additionally, during those first few months there was no office furniture, requiring staff to use tables as makeshift desks and create “do-it-yourself” cabinets by strategically stacking empty boxes.

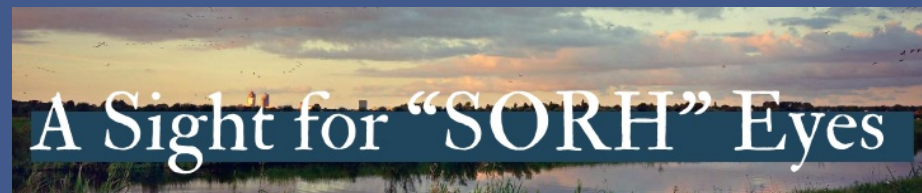
The names and faces of many wonderful

SORH staff have changed through the years, but the commitment to support rural communities has never wavered. SORH is fortunate to have a stable workforce with 70 percent of the staff having worked at SORH for more than seven years.

Analyst Dorothy Bryant is the only remaining original staff member and has worked for SORH since the office was established. When asked about the changes she's been part of during the last 23 years, Dorothy stated, "We stood up to many challenges that have been presented to us, and have always focused on resolving issues and managing additional workloads, rather than complaining about how we were going to get the job completed. We were a CCTA – Communication, Customer Service, Teamwork, and Accountability – team long before the slogan was ever introduced to the SORH office. I would say that we have always been "here to serve" in whatever capacity that is required of us, ready to assist our communities, colleagues, partners and stakeholders, or other state agencies."



[Read the full article here.](#)



Clinch CEO Ammons Shares "Winning Ways of Women in Rural Healthcare" at NRHA Critical Access Hospital Conference



Angela Ammons, (far right) CEO of Clinch Memorial Hospital in Homerville, co-presents at the National Rural Health Association annual conference in Kansas City, MO. Stacey Gabriel, (left) CEO of Hocking Valley Community Hospital in Logan, OH and Robyn Dunckhorst, (center) CEO of Humbolt General Hospital in Winnemucca, NV joined her in the breakout session to share their perspectives on the "Winning Ways of Women Leaders in Rural Health Care".

Angela Ammons, CEO of Clinch Memorial Hospital in Homerville, Ga. shared her inspiring personal story of her journey on becoming a hospital CEO. She offers her perspective on the "Winning Ways

of Women Leaders in Rural Health Care" at the National Rural Health Association (NRHA) critical access hospital (CAH) conference in Kansas City, MO on September 29. Joining her at the table was Stacy Gabriel, CEO of Hocking Valley Community Hospital in Logan, OH and Robyn Dunckhorst, CEO of Humboldt General Hospital in Winnemucca, NV.

The session was moderated by Heidi Hughes, risk advisor for Rural Hospital Insurance of America, who asked for the CEOs' perspectives and experiences on their pathways to leadership, how they connect, communicate, and collaborate on behalf of their respective hospitals, how they each drive change, game changers, and what's next as they continue to face the day to day challenges of running a CAH in a rural community.

Prior to the breakout session on the final day of the conference, South Georgia Medical Center - Lanier Campus in Lakeland, Ga. received an award in a special presentation ceremony as one of Chartis Health's national top 20 CAHS for quality improvement.

Also attending the conference was Dawn Waldrip, SORH Director of hospital services, and Amanda Sutton, program operations specialist for hospital services. The CAH conference is an annual event where CAHs and SORHs nationwide hear national legislative updates, models for success, current trends, and best practices on a plethora of topics affecting rural communities and have opportunity to network with other states, partners, and state and federal organizations.

Focus on Rural Health

Georgia Charitable Care Network Celebrates 20th Anniversary

Georgia Charitable Care Network (GCCN) is proud to celebrate its 20th anniversary as an organization that nurtures partnerships with clinics all over the state of Georgia to ensure access of quality health care to low-income residents, particularly in rural areas. (It is estimated that at least 1.2 million Georgians currently do not have health insurance.)

GCCN is a long-standing grantee within the State Office of Rural Health (SORH) Programs division. Donna Looper currently serves as GCCN's executive director, has been with the organization since 2007, and is proud of GCCN's important legacy across two decades.



"We have been celebrating this great milestone all year as we're thrilled and excited that the organization has made it to 20 years and is still an important advocate and partner for clinics all over the state of Georgia," said Looper. "We love that GCCN has aided in strengthening our clinics while helping them become more sustainable in their overall goal of providing high-quality direct patient care."

In 2015, the relationship between GCCN and SORH was officially established. With the collective understanding that the unmet needs for healthcare were overwhelmingly found in the rural areas of the state, a relationship between GCCN and the SORH seemed obvious.

[Read the full article here.](#)

For more information about SORH programs, contact Nita Ham at nham@dch.ga.gov.

From Hospital Services

SORH Offers Rural Emergency Hospital Conversion Resources-

Irwin County Hospital is Georgia's First REH



Irwin County Hospital, located in Ocilla, serves a community of 9,126 rural residents according to July 2022 estimates of the U.S. Census Bureau.

Irwin County Hospital in Ocilla is the first hospital to transition to the Rural Emergency Hospital (REH) model in Georgia. The REH is a new designation for eligible rural hospitals recognized by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). In December 2020, Congress established the REH model in Section 125 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act

2021, to address concerns that some rural hospitals would not be able to sustain operations and are at risk of closure. Under the new REH designation, which became effective Jan. 1, 2023, CAHs and certain rural hospitals can convert to a REH, allowing continued access to certain health services in the communities they serve.



As a REH, Irwin is required to provide 24-hour emergency and observation services with an annual average length of stay of less than 24 hours, diagnostic lab and radiological services, a pharmacy drug storage area, and discharge planning overseen by a qualified professional. REHs do not provide inpatient care but have agreements with other hospitals to transfer patients when needed.

In addition to these required services, REHs are allowed to provide outpatient services of their choosing to include behavioral health, radiology, laboratory, and outpatient rehabilitation. A REH may also establish a separate, unique unit or level of care licensed as a Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) to provide post-REH or post-hospital services.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Waldrip will Present "Hints and Best Practices" At October Flex Coordinator Orientation

Dawn Waldrip, SORH director of hospital services and Flex coordinator, has been invited to present an instructional session at the Fall Flex Program Workshop October 17-19 in Duluth, MN. The session, "Hints and Best Practices from an Experienced Flex Coordinator", will focus on four Flex Program fundamentals including, Managing the Flex Program, Managing Information and Evaluation, Strengthening Quality Reporting and Improvement, and Improving Financial Sustainability.

The goal of the Flex Program workshop is to provide new or existing Flex program staff an orientation to the Flex program. The workshop will cover multiple topics including value-based health care, population health, critical access hospital finance, quality and performance improvement concepts, emergency medical services, Flex program core competencies, and best practices.



The Flex orientation is held semi-annually for all 48 states administering the Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility (Flex) grant program and is hosted by the National Rural Health Resource Center on behalf of the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy.

For questions about the Flex program, contact Dawn Waldrip at dawn.waldrip@dch.ga.gov.



Primary Care Office Welcomes SORH's First Intern- Lisa Selfe is Pursuing Master's Degree in Public Health



The SORH Primary Care Office welcomes SORH's first intern, Lisa Selfe. Lisa began her internship in August and will work with the Primary Care Office and Georgia Farmworker Health Program until April 2024. She will be training on the Conrad 30 J-1 Visa Waiver Program, National Health Service Corps new site and recertification review process, Health Professional Shortage Area designations, and Health Resources Service Administration Georgia Farmworker Health program grant.

Lisa has been a registered dental hygienist providing clinical oral healthcare for 30 years. She graduated with an associate degree from Clayton State University in 1994 and received her bachelor's degree in 2022. She is a member of Sigma Phi Alpha (Dental Hygiene Honor Society), is former Student Association Dental Hygienist President, a Hinman Scholar and received a Georgia Dental Association scholarship. She was also honored by Governor Kemp for being appointed to the Georgia Board of Dentistry.

Lisa is currently attending Georgia Southern University where she is pursuing a master's degree in public health. She is passionate about bridging the gap between medicine and dentistry and wants to increase access to care for the vulnerable and underserved populations in rural Georgia and help to eliminate the disparities they face. Lisa states "I am excited about this opportunity; it's my chance to improve the health and well-being for the people who live in underserved rural Georgia. This experience is opening a new door for me, and I can't wait to see where it takes me."

Once again, welcome Lisa!

Update: The National Health Service Corps will be accepting site recertification applications until October 12, 2023. If you have any questions, please contact Beth Walker at beth.walker@dch.ga.gov or Dorothy Bryant at dbryant@dch.ga.gov.

For more information, please visit <https://nhsc.hrsa.gov/sites/eligibility-requirements>.



...you're walkin' in high cotton!

With the fall season and cooler weather approaching, it is time to begin harvesting cotton in Georgia. Also known as "white gold", cotton production provides significant benefits to rural Georgia

providing 53,000 cotton-related jobs, and an overall financial impact exceeding \$3 billion, according to the University of Georgia Extension Service.

A bale of cotton weighs about 500 pounds and approximately 73 percent goes into making apparel, 18 percent into home furnishings, and 8 percent into industrial products. Approximately two-thirds of the harvested crop is composed of seed, which are crushed to separate its three products - oil, meal, and hulls. Goods made from these include cottonseed oil for cooking; cottonseed meal, a high protein supplement for livestock and poultry; hulls, a roughage for livestock feed; and linters, a cellulose feed stock for many industrial and consumer products.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture's most recent data, Georgia produced 2,210,000 bales of cotton in 2021 with Dooly County being the top producer at 124,700 bales. The cotton boll and opened boll pictured above are part of an abundant, "high cotton" crop in a neighboring field in Crisp County where 64,400 bales were produced in 2021.

Photo by Dawn Waldrip



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DCH Mission Statement

The Department of Community Health will provide Georgians with access to affordable, quality health care through effective planning, purchasing and oversight.

We are dedicated to
A Healthy Georgia.

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**Georgia Department of Community Health
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Georgia Dept. Of Community Health | 2 Peachtree Street, 40th Floor, Atlanta, GA 30303

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