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## **Office of Rural Health to receive \$485,000 Grant to Serve Critical Access Hospitals**

**ATLANTA** – Dr. Rhonda Medows, Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH), announced today that the State Office of Rural Health (SORH) located in Cordele has received a grant totaling \$485,000 to assist Georgia’s Critical Access Hospitals (CAH), Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and rural communities. The grant was awarded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). SORH applied for the grant in June 2007.

“This grant will allow the Office of Rural Health to address its mission to improve access to health care in rural and underserved areas,” Dr. Medows said. “SORH will be able to educate and train staff at the 35 critical access hospitals in quality improvement and patient safety, current financial practices and other vital resource materials that will assist them in serving patients in rural Georgia.”

CAHs are defined as small rural hospitals with up to 25 beds. In Georgia, there are 35 hospitals with CAH status. CAHs receive cost-based Medicare reimbursements for acute inpatient and outpatient services.

Under the HRSA-supported Rural Hospital Flexibility Grant Program (FLEX), the award to the SORH will continue to support certified CAHs and help strengthen the development of rural networks of care in Georgia, including emergency medical services.

The FLEX grant focuses on five areas:

1. Sustainability of CAHs
2. Quality Improvement
3. Emergency Medical Services (EMS)
4. Rural Health Networks
5. State Rural Health Plan

SORH will focus on the sustainability of CAHs by training, educating and evaluating staff of all 35 hospitals on issues relating reimbursement and finance.

In the area of quality improvement, SORH will use grant funds in collaboration with the Georgia Hospital Association to provide all 35 CAHs with training, education and resources to utilize a Web-based program that provides observation and document improvement in quality outcomes. In addition, SORH will work with hospitals to proactively identify the potential for adverse events, furthering the development of a culture of patient safety and a peer review network.

SORH will work with the State Office of EMS to provide statewide Web-based training for local EMS paramedics and emergency medical technicians, medical directors and emergency department physicians. Also, the SORH will assist community health care delivery systems address issues such as disease management and prescription drug assistance. Finally, the SORH has developed the State Rural Health Plan which will provide communities with a written source of information and data to facilitate the community in the creation of a local solution to managing their health care issues.

Patsy Whaley, Director of Hospital Services for SORH, serves as the program director for the FLEX Program. After receiving the news about the grant, she stated that she is proud to be able administer these grant funds which are vital in facilitating the stabilization of Georgia's health care delivery system.

*For a list of Georgia's CAHs, please access*  
[www.dch.georgia.gov/cah](http://www.dch.georgia.gov/cah)

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