



# Georgia Rural Health News & Updates

*Eighth Edition - April, 2020*



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[Georgia Rural Health News and Updates](#) is the quarterly newsletter from the Georgia State Office of Rural Health for all matters rural. It provides an update on the progress made to improve rural health in Georgia to hospitals, primary care practices, FQHCs, stakeholders, vendors, health care advocates, and

## A Final Message From Our Executive Director...



**Patsy Whaley Announces Retirement After 14 Years at Georgia SORH**

As this will be my final "Message from the Executive Director," I want each and every one I have worked with over my 14 years with the Georgia State Office of Rural Health, both in Hospital Services and as Executive Director, to know what an honor and privilege it has been to know and work with you in our shared mission to provide access to and support of strong and sustained rural health services for the citizens we serve.

While I look forward to retirement with great anticipation, I know there is so much I will miss. One of those I will miss most is the SORH staff. I leave you with an outstanding staff who do an exceptional job and who have been one of the true blessings in my life both as individuals and as professionals. Going forward they

will continue to serve you and rural Georgia with the same enthusiasm, skill, knowledge and commitment as they have historically.

Again, it has been an honor and privilege to serve you, the State Office of Rural Health, the State of Georgia and all of those who wisely choose to make rural Georgia their home. It is my sincere hope that my contribution to rural health in Georgia, from my beginnings as admissions clerk at Clinch Memorial Hospital in 1968 to retiring as Executive Director of the State Office of Rural Health in 2020, has been one you consider positive. Born rural, raised rural, worked rural and now retiring rural, and I have loved it. Wishing you all well and much success in all that you do for the benefit of everything rural. Take care, and thanks for the memories!

Patsy



## Rural Hospital Stabilization Program Supports New Geri-Psych Unit at Dodge County Hospital

As part of the ongoing Rural Hospital Stabilization Grant Program, SORH Director Nita Ham and Program Operations Specialist Cole Edwards recently attended the "Community Partners for Better Health" luncheon at the Dodge County Hospital in Eastman. Ham kicked off the meeting by delivering a general synopsis on the success of the program thus far and how the awarded funds from the grant were being applied specifically to Dodge County Hospital's New Directions Geriatric Behavioral Health Unit with plans to increase the number of beds in the unit as well as qualified and experienced staff.

legislators.

Our goal is to help create

*A Healthy Georgia.*

Subscribe at

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GEORGIA DEPARTMENT  
OF COMMUNITY HEALTH

### 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.*

### DCH Vision Statement

The Department of Community Health is committed to a lean and responsive state government that promotes the health and prosperity of its citizens through the innovative and effective delivery of quality health care programs.

### DCH Purpose Statement

Shaping the future of A Healthy Georgia by improving access and ensuring quality to strengthen the communities we serve.

Have an event you'd  
like to share?



Click [here](#)  
and we'll include it in our next  
newsletter!

### Quick Links

[State Office of Rural Health](#)

[Georgia Department of  
Community Health \(DCH\)](#)

[DCH Grant Opportunities](#)

[HRSA Funding Opportunities](#)

[Rural Health Information Hub  
\(RHI Hub\)](#)

[Rural Health Research Gateway](#)

[Health Professional Shortage  
Area \(HPSA\) Find](#)



**Leo Noragbon, MD**  
New Directions Medical Director

On hand at this meeting was Leo Noragbon, MD, MBA, a board-certified psychiatrist with additional training in geriatric psychiatry, who serves as the medical director for the Geriatric Psychiatric Unit at New Directions. During the meeting, Dr. Noragbon spoke on his extensive background which includes working as a consultant for over fifty nursing homes throughout his career. Dr. Noragbon also introduced

his New Directions co-worker Solange Marcel, an adult nurse practitioner with specialized training from Vanderbilt University.

After the luncheon, Ham and Edwards were given a tour of the Geri-Psych Unit and were shown the areas that were intended to be renovated over the next few months. As part of New Directions' initiative in expanding the unit, the hospital hopes to reduce the number of patients who are forced to leave their community when in need of a behavioral health facility. This will, in turn, improve family and patient satisfaction within the community.

During the tour, Ham and Edwards learned that Dodge County Hospital will continue to collect data specific to referrals and admissions to New Directions during the project period as well as use a portion of the grant funds for recruiting initiatives to increase employment within the unit.

If you would like more information about SORH projects or have an idea to share, please contact [Nita Ham](#)



Dodge County Hospital Opens  
"New Directions" Geri-Psych Unit



**A Sight for "SORH" Eyes...**

## SORH Staff Attends Rural Health Day at Capitol





The SORH staff attending Rural Health Day at the Capitol are (L-R) Nita Ham, Dorothy Bryant, Patsy Whaley, Tiffany Hardin and Dawn Waldrip

Representatives from the SORH attended the annual Georgia Rural Health Day at the Capitol in Atlanta on February 26th. This event highlights the importance of health care funding for rural communities. The SORH staff also had the opportunity to greet rural stakeholders and discuss the programs and opportunities the SORH has to offer. Those attending from the SORH included: Nita Ham, SORH Director; Dorothy Bryant, HPSA Specialist-Primary Care Office; Patsy Whaley, SORH Executive Director; Tiffany Hardin, Director, Georgia Farmworker Health Program; and Dawn Waldrip, Director of Hospital Services.

### *From Hospital Services...*

## **Georgia Shares Best Practices for Quality Improvement to National SHIP Counterparts**

The State Office of Rural Health (SORH) Hospital Services Director, Dawn Waldrip, recently had the opportunity to share Georgia's best practices for quality improvement on the February 2020 Small Rural Hospital Improvement Program (SHIP) monthly educational webinar provided by the National Rural Health Resource Center. By request, Waldrip presented Georgia's SHIP Program, "HCAHPS to Guide Change" to the 46 SHIP participating states. HCAHPS are the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Services, a survey for adult inpatients that assesses patient satisfaction.



Jasper staff, Robin Carey, Lawanda Bennett and Courtney Patrick work on team building activity as part of SHIP programming

Waldrip's presentation shared background on the development of the program, why the GHAREF consortium was chosen, and the overall goals and outcomes expected. Thirty-nine hospitals participate in the GHAREF consortium.

The SORH works in partnership with the Georgia Hospital Association Research and Education Foundation (GHAREF) to provide Georgia's 58 small rural and critical access hospitals initiatives that include education, professional development, technical assistance, and strategies to improve staff communication and teamwork. Coaching for the implementation of Patient and Family Engagement and Patient and Family Advisory Councils is included and each rural hospital receives \$6,000 to offset HCAHPS vendor fees associated with reporting requirements.



GHAREF provided onsite Team Strategies and Tools to Enhance Performance and Patient Safety (TeamSTEPPS) training recently to staff at one of the 39 SHIP hospitals, Jasper

Donna Holman, Mitzi Chambers, and Carol Atkinson of Jasper Memorial Hospital are shown participating in TeamSTEPPS activity

Memorial. TeamSTEPPS training is structured to improve staff communication and team building. Patient safety experts agree that communication and other teamwork skills are essential to the delivery of quality health care and to preventing and mitigating medical errors and patient injury and harm.

The remaining nineteen Georgia SHIP-eligible hospitals not participating in the GHAREF consortium participate in the HomeTown Health Consortium, the SHIP Special Innovation Project (SIP). These hospitals have committed to a robust four-year project that will produce or improve a particular service to the community with measurable outcomes surrounding care coordination.

The SHIP is a federal grant supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources Services Administration's (HRSA) Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP). The SHIP provides over \$688,000 to Georgia's small rural hospitals to meet the costs of implementing data system requirements established under the Medicare Program, including using funds to assist hospitals in participating in improvements in value and quality health care such as Value-Based Purchasing, Accountable Care Organizations and Payment Bundling.

For information about this or other Hospital Services projects, contact **Dawn Waldrip**.

*From the Primary Care Office...*

## Application Cycle is Open for National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Programs

The National Health Service Corps (NHSC) opened its application for three loan repayment programs: the [NHSC Loan Repayment Program](#); the [NHSC Substance Use Disorder Workforce Loan Repayment Program](#); and the [NHSC Rural Community Loan Repayment Program](#).

**Applications will be accepted through Thursday, April 23, 2020 at 7:30 pm ET.**

PROGRAM TYPE	NHSC Loan Repayment Program	NHSC SUD Workforce Loan Repayment Program	NHSC Rural Community Loan Repayment Program
DISCIPLINES ELIGIBLE FOR ALL PROGRAMS	Physicians (DO/MD) • Nurse Practitioners (NP) • Physician Assistants (PA) • Certified Nurse Midwives (CNM) Health Service Psychologists (HSP) • Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW) • Psychiatric Nurse Specialists (PNS) Marriage and Family Therapists (MFT) • Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC)		
DISCIPLINES ELIGIBLE FOR SPECIFIC PROGRAMS	Dentists (DDS/DMD) Dental Hygienists (RDH)	Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Counselors • Pharmacists (PHARM) Registered Nurses (RN)	<small>*Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNA) are only eligible for the Rural Community LRP</small>
AWARD AMOUNT	\$50K full-time / \$25K part-time	\$75K full-time / \$37.5K part-time	\$100K full-time / \$50K part-time
SERVICE COMMITMENT	2 YEARS	3 YEARS	3 YEARS
NHSC HEALTH CARE SITE	✓ Any NHSC-approved site	✓ Any NHSC-approved SUD site	✓ Any rural, NHSC-approved SUD site

Visit the [NHSC website](#) to review the Application and Program Guidance (APG) documents and learn more about eligibility and specific disciplines. Each program has a different APG with the detailed information needed to apply, including eligibility requirements, site information, documentation, and service requirements. Read the APG carefully before starting an application.

If you have questions, contact Beth Walker, PCO Director at 229-276-2750; Dorothy Bryant, HPSA Analyst, at 229-401-3095; or Olakesta Outlaw-Houser, Program Associate, at 229-401-3090.

## ***St. Joseph's Mercy Care and Healthcare for Homeless: Two SORH Programs Serving Atlanta's Homeless Populations***

Recently, Tiffany Hardin, Director for the Georgia Farmworker Health and Healthcare for the Homeless Programs, conducted a site visit for the Healthcare for Homeless Program at Mercy Care Atlanta and was accompanied by SORH Executive Director, Patsy Whaley.

The site visit included a tour of the

Mercy Care Clinic location on Decatur Street in Atlanta and one of their five mobile clinics as well as Mercy Care partners CHRIS 180 whose mission is to heal children, strengthen families and build community.

Since 1985, Mercy Care has been a healing presence for the under insured and uninsured, unemployed and anyone experiencing homelessness. Mercy Care's network of primary care clinic sites serves thousands of people in need of primary medical care, dental and vision care, behavioral health,



Tiffany Hardin stands with workers in front of one of the five Mercy Care Mobile Clinics serving the homeless population in Atlanta

diagnostics, and social services.

The incredible work that this organization demonstrates not only contributes to the decrease in unnecessary emergency department visits, but they are also proactively building trust with Atlanta's most vulnerable populations through clinic services and outreach programs.

These programs lead to more preventive care, housing, improved quality of life and re-connection to family and support systems.



Patsy Whaley and Tiffany Hardin from the SORH visit at Mercy Care Clinic in Atlanta

## *Tina Register is DCH Platinum Champion of Learning* **SORH Staff Wins ELW Team Division Champion**



Tina Register

Tina Register, Program Operations Specialist for the Georgia Farmworker Health Program at the State Office of Rural Health, was recently named the 2019 Department of Community Health (DCH) Employee Learning Week (ELW) Platinum Champion of Learning for being the top ELW individual learner for 2019. Tina was awarded a certificate and complimentary work style assessment for her achievement. She earned 400 points for her effort, the highest overall for the DCH. Tiffany Hardin, Director of the Farmworker Health Program, was also named an ELW Platinum Champion earning 330 points.

Several other SORH staff achieved Gold Status, earning 100-299 learning points, including Beth Walker, Dawn Waldrip, Olakesta Outlaw-Houser, Sheryl McCoy, Nita Ham, Cole Edwards, and Dorothy Bryant.

In addition to the individual achievements, the SORH team won the 2019 ELW Team Division Champion of Learning by facilitating a creative and innovative learning experience, "The Delicate Art of Dancing with Porcupines," an exercise that identified their individual work style personalities and how to effectively work with others.



Sheryl McCoy (C) leads SORH Team in "The Delicate Art of Dancing With Porcupines"

## **Cynthia Stubbs Retires After 30 Years' Service to State of Georgia**



Cynthia Stubbs

The SORH Staff congratulates Cynthia Stubbs on her retirement effective April 1st, having served the State of Georgia over 30 years. Cynthia came to the State Office of Rural Health in 2016 as a Systems Analyst 2 with the Office of Information Technology, after having worked at the Georgia Department of Family and Children's Services first as a caseworker, then as a systems analyst.

Cynthia has gone above and beyond in her role at the SORH and will be greatly missed. According to Patsy Whaley, Executive Director of the SORH, Cynthia has "...been a wonderful colleague and a tremendous friend."

The SORH staff wishes Cynthia a long and happy retirement with her family and friends and expresses their heartfelt thanks to her for her dedication and hard work.



**April 14-17, 2020**

**HomeTown Health 20th Annual Spring Conference**

Jekyll Island Convention Center

Jekyll Island, GA

**May 5-7, 2020**

**SORH Region B, Regional Partnership Meeting**

Marriott Lexington City Center

Louisville, KY

**May 21, 2020**

**Georgia Hospital Association Center for Rural Health Q2 Meeting**

Macon Marriott City Center

Macon, GA

**June 4, 2020**

**SORH Advisory Board Meeting**

SORH Conference Room, 502 S. 7th Street

Cordele, GA

**June 17-19, 2020**

**Georgia Hospital Association Summer Meeting**

The Ritz Carlton-Amelia Island

Fernandina Beach, FL

**You might be rural if...**



***You were "born rural, raised rural, worked rural and now retiring rural, and [I] have loved it" - Patsy Whaley Hodge***

The staff at the SORH congratulates our beloved Executive Director, Patsy Whaley Hodge, on her well-deserved retirement. Patsy has been a wonderful leader, mentor and friend and has most definitely made a positive impact on rural healthcare in Georgia. She will be greatly missed. The SORH staff wishes her much happiness as she embarks on this next chapter of her "rural" journey.

