



Georgia Rural Health News & Updates

Ninth Edition - July, 2020



Join Our Mailing List

In This Issue

[A Message from Our Executive Director](#)

[SORH Staff Adapts to Teleworking](#)

[A Sight for "SORH" Eyes:](#)

[Georgia SHIP Hospitals Receive Nearly \\$5 Million in Coronavirus Aid](#)

[Conrad State 30 J-1 Visa Waiver Program Addresses Qualified Physician Shortage](#)

[Rural and Farmworker Communities Benefit From Federal Coronavirus Aid](#)

[Upcoming Events](#)

[You Might Be Rural If...](#)

SUGGESTION BOX

Submit an article or email us a suggestion [Here](#)

[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 legislators.

Our goal is to help create

A Healthy Georgia.

Subscribe at

rural.health@dch.ga.gov



GEORGIA DEPARTMENT
OF COMMUNITY HEALTH

DCH Mission Statement

A Message from our Executive Director...



Stephen Register
SORH Executive Director

In the past three months, the healthcare industry in our state and country has been dealt a significant blow in the wake of the COVID-19 public health emergency. Our rural areas are certainly no exception.

As the newly appointed Executive Director for the Georgia State Office of Rural Health (SORH) and on behalf of the SORH staff, we want to extend our deepest sympathies to our rural communities who have been impacted - great or small. Our mission remains the same in increasing access to health care and improving the well-being of Georgia's rural residents in underserved areas and ultimately reducing health disparities.

During this time, we are reminded of the resolve our rural healthcare workers have, as we continue to hear of the hard-fought care and compassion provided to our rural residents. The stories of healthcare heroism that reside in our underserved areas is nothing short of a David versus Goliath scenario. To put it simply, rural Georgia's doctors, nurses, patient care technicians and volunteers are the strongest and best this state has to offer.

Although, these have been the most trying times our state and country have ever experienced, we here at the SORH remain steadfast in our quest to serve you, our rural Georgians, wholeheartedly. I am extremely optimistic as to what the future holds, as we plow through this adversity together and look forward to the progress we will achieve in the coming months.

All the best,
Stephen



SORH Programs Haven't Missed a Beat as Staff Adapts to Teleworking Mandate

As with so many workplaces around the country, all State Office of Rural Health (SORH) employees were mandated to begin teleworking on March 20th as the outbreak of COVID-19 loomed large. The first few days resulted in a strange wave of uncertainty as employees faced the reality of re-purposing the place they call home into an office. Thoughts of "Don't forget to take home the portable laptop charger! I wonder if I should lug the printer home if

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](#)

forget to take home the portable laptop charger!...I wonder if I should tag the printer home if I'm just going to be there a couple weeks?...and Oh, for goodness sakes, I forgot to grab my password sheet!" were all too common.

The transition was initially a bit awkward, heightened by the uncertainty of the teleworking tenure. However, as the telework days began rolling into weeks and it soon became evident that our time at home was becoming semi-permanent for the foreseeable future, the SORH staff adapted quickly and efficiently, discovering the benefits of working from home.

For example, weekly staff meetings were shifted virtually to the Microsoft Teams platform. It only took a couple of attempts for staff to adapt to the platform and to seeing each other's smiling faces virtually. In no time, it would have appeared to an outsider that we had been conducting meetings this way for years. With the SORH team also holding countless meetings during the week, dial-in phone conferences also became essential, quickly revealing their worth in social-distancing times. In fact, due to the simplicity of each party being able to call in from wherever their location, phone conferences have allowed the various programs of SORH to efficiently keep turning without missing a beat.

According to Beth Walker, PCO Director, she has enjoyed teleworking with her new co-worker, Fluffy the Cat. Walker said, "She's my little assistant, she has become so dependent on me being home that she's going to go into shock when I'm not around every minute of the day!" Walker even reported that her co-worker Fluffy recently curled inside her open laptop bag for a quick afternoon nap during their busy workload.



Fluffy the Cat
Beth Walker's "Little Assistant"

We look forward to our "new normal", whatever that may bring. I'm certain we will return to the office soon. But, in the meantime, our abilities to quickly adapt to new environments were successfully tested. This pandemic has caused everyone to learn more about their own resilience and adaptability and we will all carry with us a new perspective moving ahead.

Cole Edwards,
Program Operations Specialist, SORH Program



A Sight for "SORH" Eyes...

Learning a New Job Remotely has Proven Challenging for SORH Team Member



On April 16, 2020, Amanda Laughter joined the SORH team as a Program Operations Specialist for the Hospital Services Department. The start of Amanda's career with SORH was not quite what it was anticipated to be. "Talk about your *not-so*-typical way to start a brand-new job", Amanda stated. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Amanda began her first day working from home rather than heading into the office, and this is where she has been ever since.

Amanda states "Although I have enjoyed the benefits of working from home (no commute, saving money on fuel, eating out, etc.), it has been challenging at times. It is a bit more difficult to learn a new role and how all the pieces fit

But Amanda has taken it all in stride. She is ready and willing to jump in on any project that she is asked to be a part of. Her down time is spent researching and studying the grants that her department facilitates as well as taking advantage of the virtual training that the Department of Community Health offers.

Amanda concludes, "I am very excited to be a part of the face of SORH and whatever our 'new normal' may be for years to come!" Amanda brings a broad array of experience and new ideas to the SORH team. She has 15+ years' experience in business management prior to beginning her career in healthcare. During the past five years she has worked as a Practice Manager and Operations Manager for two large clinic practices in South Georgia. She also has a vast knowledge in the field of credentialing and physician enrollment.

From Hospital Services...

Georgia SHIP Hospitals Receive Nearly \$5 Million in Coronavirus Aid

On April 17, 2020, the Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH), State Office of Rural Health (SORH) received nearly \$5 million in federal funding to support Georgia's small rural hospitals combat the COVID-19 health crisis.

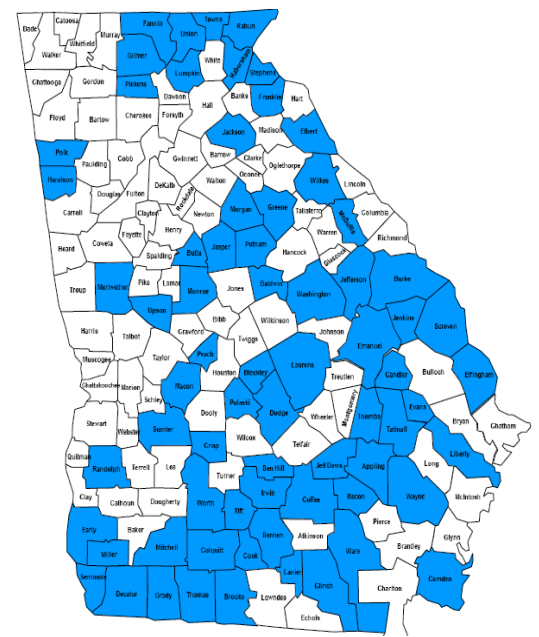
The Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) Federal Office of Rural Health Policy received \$180 million in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act to support COVID-19 related activities. The funding was awarded to states through the Small Rural Hospital Improvement Program (SHIP) grant mechanism. Each of Georgia's 58 eligible hospitals received \$84,317 to support the increased demands for clinical services and equipment, as well as the short-term financial and workforce challenges related to responding to meeting the needs of patients with the COVID-19 virus seeking care at their facilities.

DCH/SORH has worked diligently to fast

track the awards to the 58 hospitals. To date, 88% of the funds have been disbursed to the recipient hospitals. Under Federal regulations, the recipient hospitals will be required to submit quarterly spending reports to the SORH through October, 2021.



The one-time funding will provide support to the hospitals to prevent, prepare for and respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency. Hospitals may utilize the funds in the areas of safety to include the purchase of supplies relative to infection prevention; response to include detection, prevention, diagnostics



and treatment of COVID-19; and the maintaining of hospital operations to include salaries, personnel and equipment.

**Georgia's 58 SHIP Hospitals (shaded blue)
Receive Funds to Combat COVID-19**

For information about the programs within the Hospital Services Department, contact Director, [Dawn Waldrip](#).

From the Primary Care Office..

Georgia Conrad State 30 J-1 Visa Waiver Program Addresses Qualified Physician Shortage

The Conrad State 30 J-1 Visa Waiver program may recommend up to 30 waivers per federal fiscal year (October 1 - September 30) to address the shortage of qualified physicians in the state's medically underserved areas. Waiver support in Georgia is based on, but not limited to: 1) compliance with State and Federal laws and regulations; 2) need for service; 3) community support for the placement; 4) employer's commitment to treating patients regardless of their ability to pay; 5) physician's intent to work long-term in a designated Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) or Medically Underserved Area (MUA); and 6) effect of the placement on other Georgia programs and policies. Waiver support is at the sole discretion of SORH, as is the number of waiver requests supported by SORH for a particular employer, health care facility, or medical discipline.

The 30 waiver slots are limited annually as follows:

The State Office of Rural Health will begin accepting applications beginning August 1, 2020 - August 31, 2020. Beginning September 1, 2020, applications will be prioritized in the following order: Primary Care physicians working in a rural county located in a HPSA, MUA, MUP, MHPSA followed by Primary Care physicians working in an urban county located in a HPSA, MUA, MUP or MHPSA. Slots remaining will be filled by a Specialist working in a HPSA, MUA or MUP followed by Flex slots. No more than three slots are filled per facility (teaching hospitals are exempt from this limit).

Flex 10:

The SORH may support up to ten waivers (of annual 30) for physicians not located in federally-designated shortage areas if they serve patients who reside in federally-designated shortage areas, in accordance with Section 2302, Public Law 108-441, as amended. Non-designated "flex" waiver requests are considered on a case-by-case basis. However, priority

is extended to requests for designated shortage areas (HPSAs/MUAs). Flex applicants must supply documentation that 30 percent of patients are from primary care HPSAs or MUA/Ps.



Reminder: The National Health Service Corp (NHSC) New Site Application cycle is currently open now until Tuesday, July 21, 2020 at 11:59 p.m. ET.

For more information about becoming an approved site, visit the [NHSC website](#) and review the [2020 NHSC Site Referene Guide](#).

If you have any questions, please contact:

- Beth Walker, Primary Care Office Director, (229) 276-2750, beth.walker@dch.ga.gov
- Dorothy Bryant, HPSA Analyst, (229) 401-3095, dbryant@dch.ga.gov
- Olakesta Outlaw, Program Associate, (229) 401-3090, olakesta.outlaw@dch.ga.gov

Rural and Farmworker Communities Benefit From Federal Coronavirus Aid and Response Funding

The Georgia Farmworker Health Program (GFHP) was fortunate to receive three separate Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) grants to aid in response to the unforeseen pandemic that has affected a large portion of the rural and farmworker community. Each COVID-19 grant was designed to target specific areas of need.

The first one-time supplemental award focused on providing support for preventing, preparing for, and responding to COVID-19 to include a wide range of in-scope activities including, but not limited to: patient and community education; screening; testing (including temporary drive or walk-up testing) and laboratory services; adding providers and other personnel; training; purchase of vehicles to transport patients or health center personnel; supplies (e.g., personal protective equipment, infection control supplies); equipment (e.g., telehealth equipment); and health information technology (e.g., technology to support tracking, sharing, and reporting capacity).

The second COVID-19 supplemental award known as Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act Funding supports the detection of Coronavirus (SARSCoV2) and/or the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of COVID-19 including maintaining or increasing health center capacity and staffing levels during a Coronavirus-related public health emergency.



Georgia Farmworker Health Program Receives Three Federal Coronavirus Grants

Lastly, the third COVID-19 grant titled Expanding Capacity for Coronavirus Testing (ECT) was awarded to support activities to purchase, administer, and expand capacity for COVID-19 testing through a wide-range of testing and testing related, in-scope activities that may change as COVID-19 needs evolve within communities.

As COVID-19 continues to circulate in our rural communities these funds are being utilized to expand access and services to the farmworker communities and their families within the GFHP scope of service area.

For more information on these and other grants focused on serving farmworker, homeless and special populations, please contact Tiffany Hardin at thardin@dch.ga.gov.



October 1, 2020

**SORH Advisory Board Meeting
SORH Conference Room, 502 S. 7th Street
Cordele, GA**

***All in-person events have been cancelled or adapted to virtual platforms due to the COVID-19 pandemic**

You might be rural if...





You've been to a drive thru Hot Air Balloon Glow!

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, Cordele's 71st Annual Watermelon Festival activities were cancelled. But, organizers still found one way to "spark a little joy" and safely come together as a community to celebrate the harvest of their beloved fruit. They hosted a drive through hot air balloon display at a softball complex where the community enjoyed viewing the beautiful glowing hot air balloons safely from inside their cars.

Cordele and Crisp County produces over 200 million pounds of sweet watermelons annually and is known as the "Watermelon Capital of the World".

