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July 1, 2022

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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SORH Wants to Know, What Makes You Unique?

Greetings Rural Healthcare Champions,

As we approach the end of the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2022 and soar into SFY 2023, I wanted to take this opportunity to encourage our rural hospitals, rural health clinics, and all our other rural health networking partners to think about what makes your organizations unique. We want to hear from you and learn about all the good things you are doing so that we may highlight those accomplishments through our State Office of Rural Health.



Our goal is to keep positive storytelling of rural health successes front of mind as you go about your important work. We want to capture these stories in real-time (whether through printed word or video), so please look forward to engaging with us here at the SORH in even more dynamic ways because you have news that needs to get out there! If we noticed one positive thing that has come about through all the many challenges we faced with the pandemic, we have recognized the attention to rural health needs outside rural settings. Your stories will provide us even more traction to inform Georgia about the ongoing importance of taking care of our rural communities. I encourage you to share your stories with me at stephen.register@dch.ga.gov.

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to fighting against rural health disparities.

All the best,
Stephen Register
SORH Executive Director



Georgia SORH Conducts RHS Year-In-Review Workshop



SORH Executive Director, Stephen Register greets attendees at RHS Workshop

On May 19 and 20, 2022, the Georgia State Office of Rural Health partnered with the Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center and Draffin Tucker, LLP, to bring together recipients of the Phase 6 Rural Hospital Stabilization Grant Program for the first annual Year-In-Review Workshop. The Georgia Department of Community Health Commissioner Caylee Noggle and Dr. Jean Sumner, Dean of Mercer School of Medicine, provided opening remarks. The event was hosted by Mercer University in Macon.

The purpose of the workshop was to collect data and information specific to the design, purpose, benefit, and outcomes of Rural Hospital Stabilization Grant Program participation, and to discuss the evolution of the program between the pilot phase and phase 6.



Sarah Dekutowski of Draffin Tucker, LLC leads work session with hospital leaders

Sixteen small rural and critical access hospitals participated in phase 6 of the program, which concluded at the end of June. This was the largest number of participating hospitals throughout the six years of program funding, and thirteen of the phase 6 hospitals previously participated in one of the prior 5 phases. A total of twenty-six hospital staff and CEOs attended the workshop, collectively representing all sixteen phase 6 hospitals.

The workshop included a survey component during which participants responded to 127 program-specific survey questions. Utilizing group survey technology, participants were allowed to see blinded survey results after each question.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Focus on Rural Health

NRHA Hosts Annual Conference in Albuquerque, Jefferson Hospital Earns Spot in Chartis Top 20



The National Rural Health Association (NRHA) recently hosted its 45th Annual Rural Health Conference in the “Land of Enchantment,” Albuquerque, New Mexico. Cole Edwards, Program Operations Specialist for SORH Programs, attended the conference in-person to represent the Georgia State Office of Rural Health.

Billed the “nation’s largest gathering of rural health pros,” the event brought together representatives from the NRHA as well as rural health leaders from across the nation for a hybrid event (both in-person and online).

A particular emphasis was placed on ensuring that all communities have the resources and tools they need to empower their rural citizens to have access to quality, affordable healthcare. This emphasis was reinforced by one of the key speakers, Tom Morris, Associate Administrator of the Federal

Office of Rural Health Policy at Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), who provided his expert insights on how rural health policy and federal activities can help improve care for real people in real communities.

During the NRHA Rural Health Awards Luncheon, Jefferson Hospital in Louisville, GA, received recognition as one of the Top 20 Rural and Community Hospitals based on an evaluation conducted by The Chartis Center for Rural Health.

[Read the full article here.](#)

From Hospital Services

CEO Gilman Provides Tour of Phoebe-Worth:

Mercer PA Students Learn Innovation is Key to Meeting Community Need and Remaining Financially Viable

Pictured standing left to right is Erin Lepp, MMSc, PA-C, Clinical Associate Professor and Coordinator of Community Engagement and Service Learning at Mercer College of Health Professions in Atlanta. Next to Ms. Lepp is Rachel Skinner, Nyla Lieu, Salma Mohammed, and Manogna Puchhalapalli who are all second year Physician Assistant (PA)



students from the Mercer PA Program. Seated left to right is Amanda Sutton, SORH Program Specialist for Hospital Services; Dawn Waldrip, SORH Director of Hospital Services; and Phoebe-Worth Medical Center's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Kim Gilman.

Ms. Kim Gilman, CEO of Phoebe-Worth Medical Center in Sylvester, treated a group of Mercer Physician Assistant (PA) students and SORH staff, Director of Hospital Services, Dawn Waldrip, and Program Specialist for Hospital Services, Amanda Sutton, to a personal guided tour of Phoebe-Worth on June 15th highlighting the innovative ways the hospital has adapted over the years to meet the needs of its community while remaining financially viable. Professionally, Ms. Gilman was an inspiration to the young students noting how she began her career at the hospital as an emergency room nurse and worked her way up to her current position as CEO. Phoebe-Worth is located in Worth County and is one of Georgia's 30 critical access hospitals.

Also joining the tour was Ms. Erin Lepp, MMSc, PA-C,

Clinical Associate Professor and Coordinator of Community Engagement and Service Learning at Mercer College of Health Professions in Atlanta. Ms. Lepp noted that these students specifically requested to visit a rural community to assist her in conducting a preliminary needs assessment survey to map community assets, better understand needs, and to learn more about caring for migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families. Hopefully, these efforts will help to identify new community partners and expand Mercer's service-learning reach into rural and underserved areas in Georgia so that all their students will have opportunity to be exposed to the unique challenges and healthcare needs of rural communities in our state.

[Read the full article here.](#)



J-1 Visa Waiver Program Assists in Rural Physician Recruitment and Retention

The Conrad 30 J-1 Visa Waiver program assists with challenges in physician recruitment and retention in rural areas of the state. J-1 Visa Waiver physicians are essential to providing healthcare in rural communities. Rural areas of the state often have more difficulty recruiting and retaining physicians; therefore, many rural communities fill their physician vacancies by recruiting International Medical Graduates (IMGs) who

have completed their medical training under the J-1 visa exchange visitor program.

International Medical Graduates pursuing a medical residency or fellowship training in the United States, often use the J-1 Visa non-immigrant exchange visitor visa. The J-1 visa allows IMGs to remain in the U.S. until they complete their Graduate Medical Education (GME). Upon completion, they are required under U.S. immigration law to return to their home country for at least two years before gaining eligibility for an H-1B visa to re-enter and work in the U.S. or for permanent residence.



J-1 physician have two choices upon completing their GME: 1) they can return to their home country for at least two years, or 2) they can obtain a waiver of this obligation. The J-1 visa waiver eliminates the two-year home residency requirement and allows physicians to change into H-1B visa status that will allow them to stay in the U.S.

[Read the full article here.](#)

To access the *Georgia Conrad State 30 J-1 Visa Waiver Program Policy and Application*, click [here](#).

Farmworker Program

Phoebe-Sumter Ellaville Clinic Outreach Effort Cares for Farmworkers While Teaching Students Valuable Lessons About Rural Communities



Mercer students, faculty, and Phoebe-Sumter Ellaville Clinic Staff and Volunteers gather for clinic



Providing high quality, culturally sensitive, and appropriate health care to Migratory and Seasonal Agricultural Workers (MSAWs) and their families is the mission of the Georgia Farmworker Health Program. The Phoebe Sumter Ellaville Clinic's Summer Farmworker Health Project took place June 14-16th and marked a return to connecting MSAWs with the caring staff of the Ellaville Clinic during their summer outreach.

The clinic was joined by partners including the State Office of Rural Health (SORH), the Southwest Georgia Area Health Education Center (SOWEGA AHEC), the Georgia Baptist Healthcare Foundation's Baptist Mobile Health Ministry, and student and faculty volunteers from the Georgia Southwestern School of Nursing and Mercer University Physician Assistant (PA) Program. Planning for the three-day event started in March and was spearheaded by Ms. Zina Whitaker of the SOWEGA AHEC and Ms. Pamela King, Director of the Phoebe-Sumter Rural Health Clinic in Ellaville.

Mercer students work with children in Migrant Education Program



Mercer PA students prepare quality of life bags for farmworkers

In 2019, Georgia was ranked highest among states using labor provided by agricultural workers participating in the federal H-2A guest worker program that brings migrant workers to the United States to work in agriculture for up to seven months. Although the intent was to host the Summer Farmworker Health Project for all three nights on site at the SORH Office, due to a COVID-19 incident, the team maneuvered quickly and instead, was able to take the project directly to the workers by conducting the health screenings on-site at three local hotels in Cordele, providing care to 66 workers.

[Read the full article here.](#)





...you clock in before sunrise!

Like many of our frontline healthcare workers, Georgia farmers start their day as the sun crests the horizon to begin planting and harvesting their crops. According to the Georgia Farm Bureau, agriculture is Georgia's \$69.4 billion industry providing jobs to one in seven Georgians in agriculture, forestry, or related fields. In 2020, there were 42,439 farms in Georgia encompassing nearly 10 million acres of Georgia soil.

Georgia is perennially the number one state in the nation in the production of peanuts, broilers (chickens), pecans, blueberries and spring onions. The Peach State is also at or near the top when it comes to cotton, watermelons, peaches, eggs, cucumbers, sweet corn, bell peppers, tomatoes, cantaloupes, rye and cabbage. Producers across the state raise cattle, horses, goats, sheep, hogs, poultry, turkeys and alligators. No matter which part of the state you visit, you'll see some form of agricultural production.

If you ate today, thank a farmer.

Photo courtesy of Koby Worley, Cordele, GA

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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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