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October 1, 2021

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 to hospitals, primary care practices, FQHCs, stakeholders, vendors, health care advocates, and legislators.

Leading the Fight Against Rural Health Disparities

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In This Season of Harvest We Reap a Spirit of Community and Compassion

In spite of the recent uptick in COVID-19 infections, often what is recognized through challenging moments like this, is the fruit of an indomitable spirit of community and compassion. It is appropriate to call attention to the best fruits of this harvest season, especially the tremendous labor and toil that precedes it.

This season's fruit is special, it highlights the spirit of compassion and service provided by every rural healthcare worker continuing the fight against COVID-19. With this most recent wave, rural healthcare is hurled into tremendous adversity and challenged with answering the call to provide care and treatment for our heavily affected, disadvantaged rural communities.



We did it once and we will do it again! This harvest season's fruit is ripe and grows with an abundance of experience and we welcome this time with faith and joy in the midst of continued storms. These storms have tested the land and our resolve, but in doing so have strengthened the soil in the process. As we traverse this rough landscape, it is important to remember the seasons of success that have tested us in the past, but eventually yielded the strongest crops.

Our rural healthcare workers represent the most fertile ground with the highest yield in this great state. Be encouraged, you are more than conquerors and the State Office of Rural Health fully supports your continued efforts in the fight against rural health disparities.

**Stephen Register
SORH Executive Director**



Jefferson Hospital Cuts Ceremonial Ribbon for New Behavioral Health Facility



Jefferson Hospital, located in Louisville, Georgia, held a ribbon cutting ceremony on August 25, 2021, for its new Center for Behavioral Health facility. After the ceremony, CEO Wendy Martin invited the public to tour the 11,000-square-foot newly renovated wing that previously served as the hospital's Wellness and Prenatal Centers.

"This project has been a long time in the making," said Martin. Jefferson Hospital originally applied for the Certificate of Need for the facility in 2015 and has spent the last two years renovating the space. The 10-bed inpatient unit will concentrate on geriatric psychiatric medicine for short-term stabilization with an average length of stay from 11 to 14 days.

"The hospital expects to hire between 15 and 20 new staff members to facilitate operation of the unit. Any patient with a behavioral health diagnosis is appropriate for our unit," Martin said. "We can treat patients with dementia and other disorders, but the patient must have a behavioral health diagnosis to be admitted."

With such a shortage of beds for behavioral health patients across the state, Jefferson Hospital began receiving referrals before the facility was opened. "Word is already out that the facility is here and we're already getting referrals," said Martin. "In Augusta and other communities there are patients daily that need referral to this type of facility."

[**Read the full article here.**](#)

Focus on Rural Health

Chavis House Provides Valuable Services to Burn Victim Families

The Georgia State Office of Rural Health, (SORH) is proud to continue its partnership with Burn Foundation of America, an organization founded in 1988 that assists the families of burn patients who are treated at the Joseph M. Still Burn Center at Doctors Hospital in Augusta, Georgia. This assistance includes free lodging, daily meals, and transportation at the Chavis House, located just steps away from the hospital.



Linda McKnight serves as the President and CEO of Burn Foundation of America, and she spoke of the important relationship between her office and the Georgia State Office of Rural Health. "Having the stability we receive from funding through the SORH office is a huge asset to our organization," said McKnight. "Given that no patient is charged to come to the house outside of a simple compression garment fee, our relationship with SORH helps tremendously in the day-to-day operation of the house."

The Chavis House is named in memory of Jeff Chavis, a firefighter who tragically lost his life in 2001 due to burns he suffered while in the line of duty fighting a residential fire. With 40 beds housed across seventeen different rooms, the Chavis House ensures families can play a role in the care and recovery of their loved ones. This includes a playroom which allows children a place to play while their parents build a network with other parents. McKnight estimates that 30% of all patients who utilize the Burn Foundation are children.

[Click here to read the full article.](#)

From the Primary Care Office

National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment and

Nurse Corps Programs Aid in Recruitment & Retention



National Health Service Corps Programs:

Clinicians working at NHSC approved sites are eligible to apply to any of the following NHSC programs:

National Health Service Corp Loan Repayment Program: Offers primary medical, dental, and mental and behavioral health care clinicians the opportunity to have their student loans repaid, in exchange for providing health care in communities with limited access to care.

Service Commitment: Two years Full-time service \$50,000.00

Two years Half-time service \$25,000.00

Eligible disciplines: Physician (MD/DO), Physician Assistant, Nurse Practitioner, Certified Nurse Midwife, Mental and Behavioral Health, Dentistry (DDS/DMD), Registered Dental Hygienist

Application Requirements: Applicants must be a U.S. citizen (U.S. born or naturalized) or a U.S. national.

Tax Liability: Not taxable

Website: <https://nhsc.hrsa.gov/loan-repayment/nhsc-loan-repayment-program.html>

Application Cycle: Spring of each year

National Health Service Corp Rural Community Loan Repayment Program: Supports clinicians working to combat the opioid epidemic in the nation's rural communities.

Service Commitment:

Three years Full-time service-up to \$100,000.00

Three years Half-time service-up to \$ 50,000.00

Eligible disciplines: Physicians, Nurse Practitioners, Certified Nurse Midwives, Physician Assistants, Behavioral Health Professionals, Substance Use Disorder Counselors, Registered Nurses, Pharmacists, Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists

Application Requirements: Applicants must be a U.S. citizen (U.S. born or naturalized) or a U.S. national.

Tax Liability: Not taxable

Website: <https://nhsc.hrsa.gov/loan-repayment/nhsc-rural-community-loan-repayment-program>

Application Cycle: Spring of each year

[Read the full article here.](#)

From Hospital Services

The SORH Offers Rural Health Clinics Patient Centered Medical Home Opportunity



The Georgia State Office of Rural Health (SORH) is offering five Rural Health Clinic sites an opportunity to transform their primary care delivery model into a Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH) recognized practice.

What is a PCMH? - Recognized by the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA), the PCMH model of care provides the architecture for team-based care by outlining and helping practices develop leadership structures, care team responsibilities, and partnerships with patients, families, and caregivers. Properly applied team-based care can improve comprehensiveness, care

coordination, efficiency, effectiveness, and value of care, and increase the satisfaction of patients and providers.

PCMH recognition also provides a clear roadmap for better understanding of the patient population, improving access to care by improving convenience and availability of office hours, and better engaging populations that are in need of care management. Research shows that Patient Centered Medical Homes improve quality and the patient experience and increase staff satisfaction while reducing health care costs.

Characteristics of the PCMH model include:

- A strong relationship between every patient and a primary care physician
- Coordination between the physician and the practice's team of clinicians
- Coordination of the patient's care across various healthcare settings
- The use of health information technology and analytical tools to facilitate care coordination

[Read the full article here.](#)

Apply for the PCMH Recognition Support Project by October 15th here:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FL7BWPM>



Farmworker Program

GFHP Spotlights Lepp - A Champion for Georgia's Farmworker Population

The Georgia Farmworker Health Program (GFHP) would like to spotlight their GFHP Advisory Board Chairperson, Erin Fitzpatrick-Lepp, who has served as board chair since March 2021. Mrs. Lepp is the Clinical Associate Professor, Admissions Chair Coordinator, Community Engagement and Service-Learning for Mercer University Physician Assistant Program College of Health Professions.

Ms. Lepp has been involved with GFHP since 1996 and has served as a member of the board since 2017. Mrs. Lepp has also served as both the Board Secretary and GFHP Quality Improvement (QI) Liaison since 2019.



Ms. Lepp can recall participating in the initial South Georgia Farmworker Health Project also known as GFHP Summer Project back in June 1996 with her former Emory University faculty colleague and mentor, Tom Himelick. She admitted, "this sparked a passion for advocating for high quality health care for migrant and seasonal agricultural workers and their families. My 20-year history of service and advocacy for the farmworker community has allowed me to develop expertise in developing academic-community partnerships to bring faculty and student-clinicians to volunteer at the GFHP Summer Projects in our state".

[Read the full article here.](#)

A Survey From Our Partners - What do you think about COVID-19 and Testing?



Volunteer for a study on COVID-19

www.projectpeach.org

If you are 18 years or older, live in Georgia, and you or your family are impacted by diabetes, we want to know what you think about prevention and testing of COVID-19.

Participants will be compensated.

□ (470) 289-6178

✉ radxup@emory.edu



Georgians Against COVID-19

Researchers from Emory University, Morehouse School of Medicine, and Georgia Tech are working together to learn what people in Georgia think about COVID-19 and testing. We plan to use this information to work with the community to improve health programs. We are asking participants to complete **two 20-30-minute surveys** about their experiences with COVID-19. Participants will be compensated.

Who Can Participate?

Participants must be 18 years or older, living in Georgia, **and** meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Have been diagnosed with diabetes or pre-diabetes, **or**
- Have a family history of diabetes, **or**
- Are at risk for diabetes, **or**
- Are living with someone who has diabetes, **or**
- Are a caregiver of someone with diabetes.

For more information, please visit www.projectpeach.org, email radxup@emory.edu, or call/text (470) 289-6178.



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...you host dinner for your neighbors every evening.

The SORH's Nita Ham is quite the animal lover. Every evening she and her husband, Jeff feed a family of raccoons peanut butter sandwiches and marshmallows. The cute dinner guests have become accustomed to their evening treat and visit Nita daily.

[**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**](#)

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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