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October 1, 2024

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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Oh the Places We Have Gone!

The State Office of Rural Health (SORH) staff has traveled thousands of miles within the past year. We travel to build partnerships, enhance professional development skills, learn creative methods and tools from top-notch speakers, gain new perspectives, and to spark inspiration to develop new, innovative initiatives that address the issues facing Georgia's 120 rural counties.

SORH staff attended local, regional, and national conferences, federal grant workshops, stakeholder meetings, and conducted hospital site visits. We have been to Maryland, Minnesota, Washington, D.C., Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Louisiana, and North Dakota. We've engaged partners in Macon, Atlanta, Athens, Tifton, Jekyll Island, St. Simons Island, Pine Mountain, Cordele, Forsyth, and Fort Valley. We've put in lots of windshield time traveling rural roads visiting hospitals in Elbert, Peach, Habersham, Lumpkin, Jeff Davis, Evans, Colquitt, Douglas, Crisp, Dodge, Liberty, and Ben Hill counties, to name a few.

We hope you enjoy reading about some of our most recent travels highlighted in this edition of *Short Rows*. If we haven't already, we look forward to catching up with you soon.

SORH Staff

A Sight for “SORH” Eyes

SORH Team Attends GRHA Annual Meeting at Jekyll Island *Representative Matt Hatchett was Honored as Rural Champion*



Amanda Sutton (program operations specialist for Hospital Services), Tina Register (programs operations specialist for Farmworker Health program), and Dawn Waldrip (director of Hospital Services) shared resources offered by SORH at the GRHA Annual Conference.

SORH staff, including Amanda Sutton, Tina Register, and Dawn Waldrip, networked with other rural partners and stakeholders at the Georgia Rural Health Association (GRHA) Annual Meeting held at Jekyll Island September 10-12.

The conference hosted speakers from across Georgia who presented topics on maternal health, artificial intelligence, telehealth, cybersecurity, health equity, compassion fatigue, rural health clinic billing and coding, and chronic care management. The event drew more than 130 rural stakeholders and partners.

Lloyd Simons, executive director of GRHA, pictured left, and fellow board members presented State Representative Matt Hatchett a plaque at the GRHA conference.

Rep. Matt Hatchett was recognized as a "Rural Champion" for his attention to issues facing rural healthcare and communities.

Hatchett currently serves as chairman of the House Appropriations Committee.



Focus on Rural Health

NOSORH Meeting Included Ways to Bring Power of AI to Rural Health

Cole Edwards, program operations specialist for the State Office of Rural Health (SORH) Program, recently represented the division at the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health (NOSORH) annual meeting in Niagara Falls, New York.

The meeting, held September 10-12, was attended by representatives from all 50 SORHs across the United States as well as investing partners, federal partners, and other invited guests.

The meeting centered on expanding rural health access across the country with a particular focus on advancing health equity and bolstering the healthcare workforce in rural areas.

“I very much enjoyed attending the NOSORH annual meeting as the healthcare topics covered were very relevant to what’s happening all across rural America,” Edwards said. “The setting and backdrop of the stunning Niagara Falls right down the street from the meeting made for an overall terrific experience.”

[Read the full article here.](#)



Cole Edwards (pictured above) attended NOSORH Annual Meeting in New York. Beautiful Niagara Falls was the setting for the annual meeting.

From Hospital Services

Waldrip Highlights Georgia Flex Program in Washington, D.C.

Hospital Services Director Dawn Waldrip and Program Operations Specialist Amanda Sutton attended the Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility (Flex) Grant annual reverse site visit in Washington, D.C. July 16-18. The required meeting brings together Flex coordinators across the country to discuss healthcare issues affecting the 1,368 critical access hospitals nationwide. Dawn presented details of Georgia's Flex Health Equity Improvement (HEI) project as a best practice to her peers from the 49 other Flex states along with project officers and leaders from the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy.



SORH partnered with Alliant Health Solutions on the project that provided educational support and resources to Georgia's 30 critical access hospitals focusing on health equity strategic planning, implementing screening inpatients for Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) disparities, and developing resources for patients screening positive for SDOH.

Twenty-eight of Georgia's 30 critical access hospitals participated in the program. To conclude the year-long project, participating hospitals' progress and action plans were detailed in the [Georgia State Office of Rural Health Flex Grant: 2024 Health Equity Improvement Project Playbook](#).

For more information about Flex grant programs, contact [Dawn Waldrip](#).

SORH Staff Networks With Rural Hospital Executives at GHA Annual Center for Rural Health Meeting at St. Simons



Pictured left to right: Shondia Evans, GHA small rural quality improvement advisor; Tammy Mims, CEO of Liberty Regional Medical Center; Laura Gentry, CEO of Atrium Health Navicent Peach; Dawn Waldrip, Hospital Services director; and Amanda Sutton, program operations specialist for Hospital Services

SORH Hospital Services staff had the opportunity to network with hospital executives at the Georgia Hospital Association (GHA) Center for Rural Health meeting held August 21 - 23 at St. Simons Island.

The annual meeting hosts hospital executives to discuss rural initiatives, learn best practices, and network with stakeholders across the state.

SORH staff along with Dr. Dean Burke, chief medical officer of the Georgia Department of Community Health, also presented an update on recent SORH initiatives.



Physician Recruitment and Retention Key Focus of North Dakota Conference

Beth Walker, senior director, and Olakesta Outlaw-Houser, program associate of the SORH Primary Care Office, attended the annual National Rural Recruitment and



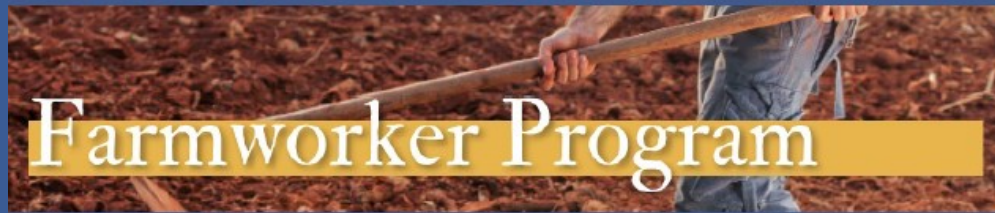
Retention Network (3RNET) conference held in Bismarck, N.D. September 17-18.

Sessions Beth and Olakesta attended were:

- Immigration updates on J-1 Visa waivers
- Updates from Federal Office of Rural Health Policy and rural Graduate Medical Education (GME)
- A panel presentation about community health worker model programs
- Area Health Education Centers (AHEC): A “Long Game” Strategy for Recruitment and Retention
- A 3RNET user panel and networking discussion
- The 3RNET behavioral health workforce expansion project

The conference concluded with an educational Lewis and Clark riverboat cruise on the Missouri river. The next 3RNET Conference will be held in Nevada in September, 2025.

[Read the full story here.](#)



Agricultural Recruitment and Farmworker Mental Health Were Important Topics Discussed at Recent Labor Relations Forum



Felipe Pacheco (standing) and Gabriela Munoz discuss updates to the state's agricultural recruitment system

Jamie Branch, senior director for the Georgia Farmworker Health Program (GFHP), recently attended the 2024 Georgia Agricultural Labor Relations Forum, a two-day educational event for agricultural professionals. The forum was held at the UGA Tifton Conference Center August 20-21.

Several GFHP board members presented valuable information to a diverse representation of the Georgia agribusiness sector. Felipe Pacheco, GFHP board member and



Jennifer Dunn speaks to attendees at agricultural forum about stress and suicide prevention within the Georgia farmworker population.

Photos by Jamie Branch.

Office of Workforce Development state monitor advocate, along with Gabriela Munoz, GFHP board member and manager of the Office of Workforce Development Migrant Seasonal Farmworker program, shared information regarding updates to the state's agricultural recruitment system.

Jennifer Dunn, GFHP board member and deputy assistant commissioner of the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, spoke on the importance of mental health with specific focus on farmworker stress and suicide prevention.



... the jay walkers have four legs!

These three whitetail deer were not at all fazed by oncoming traffic as they casually crossed the roadway to graze on the other side. According to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR), whitetail deer are highly adaptable and can live in many different habitats. They are found throughout Georgia, from the mountains to the coast, living in oak and hickory forests, rural farmlands, suburbs, golf courses, pine forests, swamps, and marshlands. DNR estimates Georgia's 2024 deer population to be 1.2 to 1.5 million. These three does live on Jekyll Island where they are protected from hunters and have free rein of the island.

Photo by Dawn Waldrip



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

[3RNet - Rural Recruitment and Retention Network](#)

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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