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April 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.

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Joel Presley Begins New Chapter at State Office of Rural Health



Joel Presley

As I begin the next chapter of my career, I am excited about my new role as the executive director of the State Office of Rural Health (SORH). I've been with SORH for just a few short weeks, and I am amazed at the quality and quantity of work that's being done for rural Georgia. The team at SORH is comprised of many talented individuals who have roots in rural Georgia and understand the myriad of complex issues faced by the communities that we serve.

I am looking forward to working with each member of the SORH team on our current initiatives and seeking out new funding opportunities to expand the impact this office can have on rural communities and their well-being. I am also looking forward to working with our existing partners and forging new partnerships.

Rural health can be challenging at times, but we must always believe we can create a healthier tomorrow.

Joel Presley
SORH Executive Director

A Sight for “SORH” Eyes

Atrium Health Navicent Primary Care Hosts Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony

New Location Expands Healthcare Access and Services Offered in Fort Valley



Pictured above (L-R) are State Office of Rural Health Hospital Services Director, Dawn Waldrip and Executive Director, Joel Presley, Atrium Health Navicent Primary Care Medical Director, Dr. Gorby Leon, Atrium Navicent Health Peach CEO, Laura Gentry, and Fort Valley Mayor, Jeffery Lundy. SORH staff joined the Fort Valley community in celebrating the opening of the clinic's new location.

The State Office of Rural Health staff along with many members of the community joined Atrium Health Navicent Primary Care in Fort Valley for a ribbon-cutting ceremony on March 14 celebrating the opening of the clinic's new location. Part of Atrium Health Navicent Peach, the facility opened to patients in the new location at 201 Avera Drive in Fort Valley on January 8. The move has allowed the practice to expand its physical space and services to patients. Advantages to the new location include a larger space dedicated solely to primary care with an additional exam room, improved parking, and handicapped accessibility. There is also a covered, drive-up entrance for patient convenience.

“Having access to a primary care provider close to home is crucial to maintaining overall health and wellness. We are proud to serve patients in Fort Valley and the surrounding community and have already heard from patients how much they like the new location,” said Laura Gentry, Atrium Health Navicent Peach CEO and vice president for Atrium Health’s Georgia market primary care service line.

Atrium Health Navicent Primary Care Fort Valley offers primary and preventive care for patients 18 and older that include routine physicals, gynecologic exams, and birth control. The clinic also offers same-day sick appointments, chronic disease management, senior care, laboratory services, and minor surgical procedures.

Atrium Health Navicent Primary Care Fort Valley is staffed by Dr. Gorby Leon, who serves as the clinic’s medical director, and nurse practitioners Kasey Fish and Brittney Harris, along with additional support teammates who ensure each patient receives personalized care.

Focus on Rural Health

Rural and Urban Hospitals "Connect" to Provide Expert-Level Care to Bainbridge Community

Memorial Hospital & Manor (MHM) connected with Emory University Hospital in Atlanta to establish an electronic intensive care unit (eICU) program. It is producing favorable outcomes for the hospital and the Bainbridge community, according to hospital representatives. MHM was awarded a Remote Critical Care Services III Grant in early 2022 from the State Office of Rural Health (SORH).

Managed by the SORH Programs division, the grant's overall purpose was to provide funding to partially defray the costs of establishing the unit, allowing Memorial Hospital & Manor to electronically partner daily with nurses and doctors from Emory.



Memorial Hospital and Manor in Bainbridge is pictured above. Pictured below is a patient and her care team discussing a treatment plan with an Emory physician from the ICU bed in Bainbridge.



Pictured above (L-R) is Shalonda Sanders, ICU manager and Lori Eubanks, CNO at Memorial Hospital and Manor in Bainbridge standing in front of a monitor connecting the hospital with an Emory University Hospital physician. Eubanks said the eICU program and partnership with Emory has benefitted the hospital immeasurably.

"Everything has gone tremendously well with the program," said Lori Eubanks, chief nursing officer for Memorial Hospital & Manor. "The connection with Emory through the project has established a special partnership that allows our ICU staff to provide that extra level of service for our patients, which has proven to be such a wonderful asset for our community."

Eubanks stated that the partnership with Emory University has instilled a level of trust for the

hospital within the local community, which has produced an increase in patient volume for Memorial Hospital's intensive care unit.

"We have done a good job promoting the program locally, and allowing the community to understand that they will be receiving the same level of care that they would get at a bigger hospital like Emory University," explained Eubanks. "In turn, our data from last year showed that both the average length of stay per patient went down, and the overall mortality rate went down remarkably over 50%, so it is very clear that the partnership has benefited our hospital immeasurably."

[Read the full article here.](#)

From Hospital Services

SHIP Project Officer Visits Georgia - **Crisp Regional Hospital and Dorminy Medical Center Share Benefits of SHIP Program**

The State Office of Rural Health (SORH) Hospital Services Program hosted Krista M. Mastel, MPH, who serves as a public health analyst with the Health Resources and Services Administration, for a site visit on February 27. Mastel is Georgia's project officer for the Small Rural Hospital Improvement Program (SHIP) that supports 55 of Georgia's small rural and critical access hospitals.

Mastel met first with Amanda Sutton, SHIP coordinator and program specialist for hospital services, and Dawn Waldrip, director of hospital services, to gain insight on the progress and outcomes of Georgia's current SHIP program. Afterward, they joined Sutton and Waldrip on a site visit to two of the SHIP-participating hospitals, Crisp Regional Hospital in Cordele, and Dorminy Medical Center in Fitzgerald.



(Top photo, L-R) Amanda Sutton, Krista Mastel, Terri Tucker, and Dawn Waldrip discuss how the SHIP revenue integrity program has benefitted Dorminy Medical Center by providing best practices in improving collections at registration.



Sutton, Mastel, and Waldrip also met with executives at Crisp Regional Hospital including Jessica Carter, April Dukes, and Genie Hamilton to talk about the benefits of SHIP.

At Crisp, the trio met with Chief Financial Officer Jessica Carter, Chief Nursing Officer April Dukes, and Director of Quality Genie Hamilton over lunch. They heard how the SHIP grant-funded

education and technical assistance provided through the “Simplified Quality Improvement and Peer Learning Network” program has benefitted their staff in understanding the importance of tracking and utilizing data to improve hospital outcomes.

After the visit at Crisp, Mastel, Sutton, and Waldrip traveled to Dorminy Medical Center where they met with Health Information Manager, Terri Tucker. She shared how Dorminy’s registration department has implemented best practices they’re learning in the SHIP “Revenue Integrity and Solutions Education” program and how she expects to see an increase in collections.

[Read the full article here.](#)

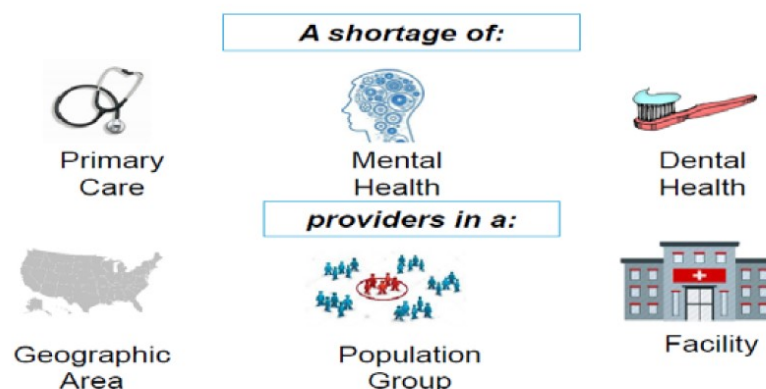


Health Professional Shortage Areas Defined

Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) designations are used to identify areas and population groups within the state that are experiencing a shortage of health professionals. There are three categories of HPSA designations based on the health discipline that is experiencing a shortage. The categories are primary care, dental health, and mental health. The primary factor used to determine a Health Professional Shortage Area designation is the number of health professionals relative to the population with consideration of high need.

Federal regulations stipulate that to be considered as having a shortage of providers, an area must have a population-to-provider ratio of a certain threshold. For primary care, the population to provider ratio must be at least 3,500 to 1 (3,000 to 1 if there are unusually high needs in the community).

Types of Health Professional Shortage Areas



HPSA scores are based on a variety of factors and range from 0 to 25 in the case of primary care and mental health, and 0 to 26 in the case of dental health. The higher the score, the greater the need for additional medical services.

Once achieved, a Health Professional Shortage Area designation places your area or facility in priority contention for grants and other funds. The benefits include access to state and federal programs providing physician recruitment assistance and financial incentives which may include National Health Service Corp Loan Repayment, Conrad State 30 programs, Medicare bonus payments, and state loan repayment programs.

[Read the full story here.](#)



Farmworker Program

Supporting Rural Farmers- **Farmworker Health Program Staff Attends Farm Stress Summit**

Georgia Farmworker Health Program Director Tiffany Hardin, and Program Specialist Tina Register attended the annual Farm Stress Summit held March 20, at the Appalachian Campus of Chattahoochee Technical College in Jasper. The summit assembles to address mental health challenges among Georgia farming communities that are challenged with



unfavorable weather and economic conditions, labor shortages, and more leaving them to deal with pressures of their profession in unhealthy ways, including considering suicide.

The approximately 80 attendees included University of Georgia faculty, farmers and their family members, agricultural community members, and mental health stakeholders who discussed opportunities on how to support Georgia's farm families in ways that promote improved mental health and well-being.

Other attendees included healthcare providers, nonprofits, county officials and faith leaders, who networked and learned from each other, connected with available community resources, and established partnerships. Speakers delved into strategies for improving partnerships at the local, state, and national levels, and breakout sessions focused on better identifying and leveraging existing community resources and natural supports.

[Read the full article here.](#)



You Might be Rural If...



...fields of pretty pink blossoms inspire dreams of warm peach cobbler!

These pretty pink buds represent bushels and bushels of juicy Georgia peaches that, depending on the weather, will be ripe for harvesting mid-May through August. Peach trees are a member of the rose family originating in China before eventually arriving in Georgia by way of Franciscan monks who first introduced peaches to Georgia in St. Simons and Cumberland islands along Georgia's coast in 1571.

The "peach state" is of course, one of the top peach producing states in the nation along with California, South Carolina, and New Jersey according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Georgia peaches mainly grow in Crawford, Taylor, Macon, and Peach counties and most of the over 130 million pounds of peaches produced in Georgia each year are sold fresh.

The beautiful field of peach blossoms pictured above is located outside of Fort Valley in rural Peach County, home of the annual summer Peach Festival where approximately 75 pounds of local peaches are used to make the World's Largest Peach Cobbler.

Photo by Dawn Waldrip



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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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