

The Rural Health Messenger

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Texas Tech Establishes World-Class Rural Institute

The Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC) recently announced the opening of the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health, which will be a world-class initiative to study health care and its associated challenges in rural areas. The new Institute will build upon the current rural health care projects and resources of the Health Sciences Center's Office of Rural and Community Health, adding new components that focus on student service learning and community-based research, as well as a visiting scholars program.

The advances made by the Health Sciences Center in rural health in the last decade culminated in the establishment of the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health in February 2006, through one of the most significant private donations in Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center history.

Patti Patterson, M.D., M.P.H., vice president of Rural and Community Health, will serve as the Institute's first director. According to Patterson, some of the greatest rural health challenges in the country are here in West Texas.

"Texas Tech is perfectly situated to study these issues and to develop real world workable solutions," Patterson explains. "This new Institute will

allow us to do so."

While the Health Sciences Center has long been viewed as a leader in rural health issues, the creation of the Institute for Rural and Community Health will elevate the institution's recognition on a national and international level, enabling researchers at TTUHSC to pursue multi-disciplinary research with other departments from Texas Tech University as well as universities across the country.

The new components that the Institute brings will only enhance an already strong rural health program. The student service learning component will focus on developing an organized program which promotes and encourages students to add community service to their academic



Above: Dr. David Smith, former Chancellor of Texas Tech University System, and F. Marie Hall create the new Institute for Rural and Community Health.

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A Word from Texas Tech

By Patti Patterson, MD, MPH
Vice President of Rural and Community Health

New Institute Broadens Rural Scope

A generous gift from F. Marie Hall to the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center has given us unprecedented opportunity to develop a world-class initiative to study health care and its associated challenges in rural areas.

By virtue of one of the most significant private donations in TTUHSC history, the new F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health will enable us to build upon the current health care projects and resources of the Office of Rural and Community Health, as well as add significant new components emphasizing student service learning, community-based research, and a visiting scholars program.



These new components will mean that the Health Sciences Center will be able to focus and strengthen its existing programs through a variety of avenues.

Extending these relationships between communities, students, health care professionals, and researchers is critical to the Health Sciences Center's community-focused mission. It takes the dedicated effort and resources of many working together to address the health care challenges facing rural communities.

Texas Tech is perfectly located to study rural-based issues and to develop "real world" workable solutions to these problems—and this new Institute will allow us to do so. Being in a very rural area will enable us to address these issues head-on and to test ideas in a "real world" environment to get solid solutions, not just questionable theoretical hypotheses that may or may not work once they are put into action.

Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center is indebted to the generosity of Ms. Hall for her vision and commitment to improving the health of the people of West Texas. Through Ms. Hall's kindness, we look forward to improving the health status of our rural neighbors across West Texas and beyond.

Vision book wins ADDY® Award

West Texas: A Vision for Rural Health in America, a publication of Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center's Office of Rural and Community Health, was recently awarded a Gold ADDY® from the Lubbock Advertising Federation in the Non-Profit: Annual Report category. Being awarded a Gold ADDY® qualifies the publication to advance to the regional competition, the second stage of the three-tier competition.



"Much of the success of the publication is due to its visual impact, which was crucial to relaying the message of rural West Texas," says Shannon Kirkland, assistant director of the West Texas AHEC Program and Rural Health at the Health Sciences Center. Credit goes to Artie Limmer (cover photography), Laine Markham and Mark Hartsfield of Hartsfield Design (graphic design) and Craftsman Printers.

Published in early 2005, the *Vision* book describes the challenges of health care in rural West Texas and describes the initiatives of the Health Sciences Center to address those issues.

Conducted annually by the American Advertising Federation (AAF), the ADDY® Awards are the largest and most representative advertising competition recognizing creative excellence in the field of advertising. According to the AAF, approximately 60,000 entries are submitted annually in local ADDY® competitions across the nation.

For more information about the *Vision* book, call Shannon Kirkland at 806.743.1338.

School of Pharmacy Names 2005 "Preceptor of the Year"

Mike Butts from Clarendon was recently recognized as the Texas Tech



Above: Dr. Art Nelson, dean of TTUHSC School of Pharmacy; Mike Butts; Jessica Crow, pharmacy student on rotation in Clarendon; and Loree Allen, former assistant director of experiential programs for the TTUHSC School of Pharmacy.

University Health Sciences Center School of Pharmacy "Preceptor of the Year" for 2005. As a community-based preceptor, Butts supervises pharmacy students for part of their clinical education. Butts is also a member of the Panhandle AHEC's Advisory Board and owns a private pharmacy in Clarendon.

Avian Flu: How Real Is the Threat of a Worldwide Pandemic?

In recent months, there has been much coverage of bird (or avian) flu, a strain of Influenza A, and we have watched it progress across Asia, Africa and parts of Europe. As flocks of birds have traveled along their traditional migration paths the world is waiting with bated breath to see if there will be another influenza pandemic stemming from this migration.

(A pandemic is a worldwide outbreak of a disease that occurs when a new flu virus appears that people have not been exposed to before. An epidemic is a nationwide outbreak.)

During the twentieth century, three pandemics occurred that spread worldwide within a year of their outbreak. The influenza pandemic of 1918 was especially infamous for its virulence and for how unprepared the world was for it. By the time the pandemic ended, influenza had killed more than 500,000 Americans (mostly young people) and more than 40 million people worldwide. The other two pandemics were not as dramatic, but still affected large numbers of people.

Why all the concern about a possible pandemic with the avian flu? According to the World Health Organization, the current avian flu trend has infected 180 people and killed 100 people in the last two years. It has the potential to suddenly cause illness in a large number of people, which could then overwhelm the health care system throughout the United States. In addition, a pandemic could jeopardize essential community services due to absenteeism in critical positions throughout the work force. Basic services, such as the provision of health care, emergency services, and other community infrastructure could be affected—and the outbreak could last for weeks or months causing long-term problems.

As with any flu, there is greater concern for more vulnerable populations such as the elderly or the chronically ill. However, because humans have not been exposed and have very little natural immunity to the avian flu (called the H5N1 virus), it has the potential to cause serious illness and

death even among healthy adults and children.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that in the United States alone, an avian influenza pandemic could infect up to 200 million people and cause between 200,000 and 1.9 million deaths. There is now worldwide concern that the current avian flu spreading across Europe could widely cross from birds to humans, and then mutate to easily transmit between humans, leading to an influenza pandemic that would be difficult to control. Scientists already have traced one gene mutation in the H5N1 virus, creating a second strain; these variations increase the difficulty in developing protective vaccines. It is likely that effective vaccines would not be available for six to eight months following the identification of the virus strain that poses the most significant risk to humans.

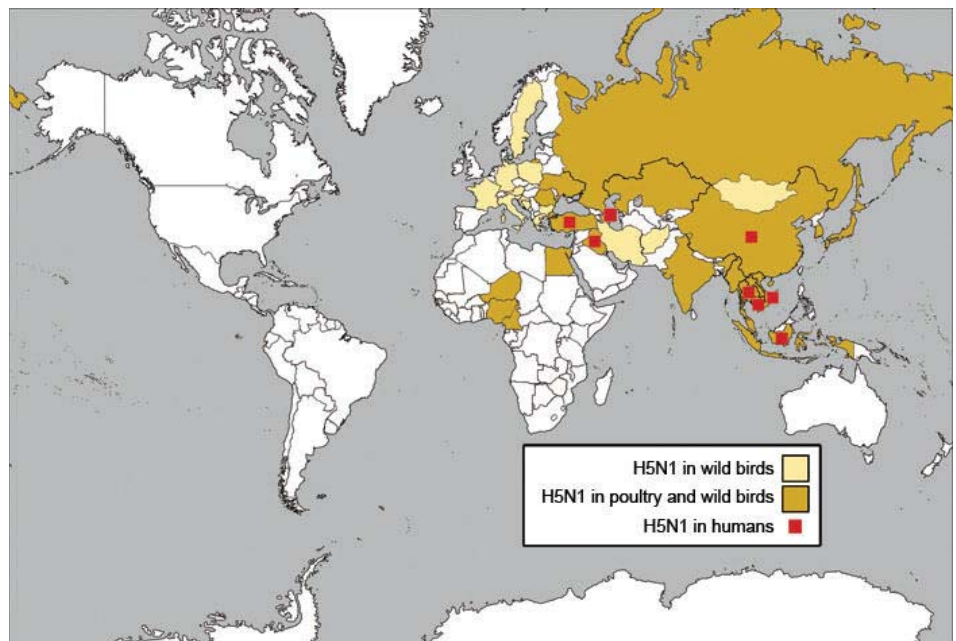
Avian flu is transmitted from bird to bird, both non-domesticated and domesticated, and has been most commonly seen in chickens, although birds such as hawks, swans and other wild species have been discovered with the virus. All of the human exposures have been from direct contact with infected chickens, mostly on farms and

in homes where chickens have the run of the house and the yard and where there is very close interaction between humans and the birds. There has been little evidence for human-to-human infection for avian flu so far.

Government officials are expecting avian flu to reach the North American continent and the United States sometime this year, probably coming through the northern route as birds follow their traditional migration patterns. Surveillance efforts have been stepped up to better track progression of the virus.

As with any public health concern, being informed is the key to protecting oneself. The individual prevention measures against avian flu are very similar to those for the normal influenza that comes each year with the winter and spring months. In addition, because of the potential impact to communities and social systems, more planning at those levels is crucial as well.

For more information about the avian flu and pandemic flu, visit www.cdc.gov and www.pandemicflu.gov. These websites provide resources for communities, businesses, schools, as well as families and individuals, to prepare for the challenges that a pandemic could bring.



Above: Nations with Confirmed Cases of Avian (H5N1) Influenza as of March 21, 2006. From the www.pandemicflu.gov website of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Telemedicine Report

Advanced Health Care Through Advanced Technology

Telemedicine Brings Nutritional Counseling to Area Students

With childhood obesity becoming a national epidemic, there is significant concern about children's lifelong health status being negatively impacted by associated diseases like diabetes and high blood pressure. It is becoming increasingly important to teach children early how to eat healthy food and to engage in regular physical exercise. And, when professional nutrition resources are not locally available, telemedicine technology can provide access.

The Center for Telemedicine at TTUHSC is addressing this need for one community's youth through a collaborative project with Hart Independent School District and Margie Kitten, a registered dietician from the TTUHSC Department of Pediatrics.

The school in Hart, a small rural community about 70 miles northwest of Lubbock, has successfully used telemedicine in its school health clinic for more than eight years through the stewardship of Retta Knox, R.N., the school nurse and the only health care provider for the small community. Using telemedicine video conferencing technology for nutritional consults is a new project for the school and for the Health Sciences Center.

"The intervention program has been in place since January of this year," explains Kitten. "Retta and I had been talking about what else we could do for the overweight children in her school, and when the Telemedicine staff approached me about using the technology to provide follow-up visits electronically to the students, it seemed to be an ideal way to address this problem."

Currently, Kitten sees about five

teenagers every month from her office in Lubbock 70 miles away. She meets twice a month with these students during the school year to make sure that they have some accountability and frequent follow-up for meeting their goals.

"It's important not to overwhelm the kids with too much information and too many goals," she adds. "So with this frequent follow-up, we can ensure that they are doing what they're supposed to be doing and then add more goals when it's appropriate."

Kitten expects to see more patients as the program grows.

This is the first time that Kitten has used video-conferencing to counsel patients at a distance, and she is excited about the results. "I am very impressed with the concept," she says. "The kids seem to be happy with the arrangement and we have a rapport just as though we were meeting face to face. Everyone seems to be very comfortable with the whole thing."

"What is so unique about this



Above: Margie Kitten, RD, LD, dietician in the TTUHSC Department of Pediatrics in Lubbock, talks distantly with students in Hart about ongoing weight management.

arrangement is that the school houses and supports the clinic—complete with dental facilities, consult rooms and a Class D pharmacy," says Claudia Cortez, telemedicine coordinator. "We just worked with the Department of Pediatrics and Hart ISD to coordinate the program, and we are seeing progress with our young patients so it seems to be working. In fact, one student has already lost 14 pounds."

The Health Sciences Center has one of the few telemedicine programs nationally that is using telemedicine for nutritional consults.

"This would be a great idea for other rural school districts to adopt," suggests Kitten. "West Texas is such a rural area that it would make a big difference to the health of our children for them to have access to these kinds of resources."



Above: Members of the 2006 Leadership Lubbock class participate in a telemedicine demonstration in mid-March, learning how technology is used to connect area rural communities to advanced health care. Leadership Lubbock is a year-long leadership training experience for local businessmen and women.

Institute cont'd from page 1

pursuits. The community-based research, education and service projects will serve to foster better communications and interaction between the world of academia and rural communities scattered across all of West Texas. The third component of the new Institute will include the visiting scholars program which will bring in accomplished academic professionals, of national and international renown, who have rural health interests.

F. Marie Hall grew up in rural West Texas with a father who was a rural physician.

“It gives me great joy to have the opportunity to establish this Institute,” Ms. Hall said. “Under the leadership of Dr. David Smith, former Texas Tech Chancellor and former president of the Health Sciences Center, along with Dr. Patti Patterson, Texas Tech has made rural issues a priority. I am very grateful that I can insure the priority remains strong.”

Focus On

COMMUNITY HEALTH

Hospitals in smaller Texas towns are no stranger to the challenges of maintaining their health care infrastructure and retaining their health care professionals. Iraan, Texas, a small community of 1,200 people, located in Pecos County has made improving health a community-wide effort.

“The hospital and the community work closely together to keep Iraan healthy,” says Teresa Callahan, a family nurse practitioner, who is CEO of Iraan General Hospital and a Permian Basin AHEC board member. To better support their nurses, the hospital has been working toward the Texas Nurse-Friendly designation, a nurse retention quality initiative of the Texas Nurses Association, for almost a year and will be submitting their completed application in early Summer.

“Achieving this designation will be good recognition for the hospital and for the nurses who work here,” says Tonya Perez, LVN, who works at the hospital.

The community also works with the Permian Basin AHEC to host medical and physician assistant students for some of their clinical training. Students work with Iraan health professionals for part of their education and, during their rotations, the hospital provides housing support.

Iraan understands good health care professionals are important to a rural community, but they also value personal responsibility for health. In partnership with the Permian Basin AHEC, the Iraan school has incorporated the CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health Curriculum) to improve students’ food choices and physical fitness activities. The school nurse, Barbara Brooks, works diligently with the cafeteria staff to develop more nutritional menus.

“Beyond what the school and the hospital can do,” says Brooks, “Being healthy is up to parents, and Iraan has great parents who volunteer their time to support activities for young people.” Outside of school-sponsored sports, parent volunteers support youth track, soccer, football, baseball, and basketball for their children. The community also participates in Creative Walking, a program that encourages community-wide walking for health.

“It’s important to accentuate the positive for the community,” adds Callahan. “Retaining our health care providers and keeping our citizens healthy is important for a small town like Iraan.”



AHEC Update

WEST TEXAS AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTER PROGRAM

Top of Texas Career Expo to Benefit Panhandle High School Students

Trying to decide what to do as a career can be a perplexing choice for many high school students. To help to address this dilemma, the Panhandle Area Health Education Center (AHEC), in coordination with the Region 16 Education Service Center (ESC), Amarillo Independent School District, Panhandle Regional Planning Commission, Panhandle Tech Prep, Texas Workforce Centers and West Texas A&M University's College Talent Search will be hosting the "Top of Texas" Career Expo in early May.

"The goal of the event is to get students to see what their future may be and what they have to do to get there," says Tommy Sweat, center director for the Panhandle AHEC.

"Reaching the students when they are sophomores gives them a chance to complete the courses they need to pursue the career path that they want. It gives them a road map, so to speak."

According to Sweat, a wide variety of careers will be covered at the fair, ranging from agriculture and natural resources to criminal justice to arts and communications to medical sciences and health care.

"We've been working on this for over a year with our local partners, and we're hoping to make it an annual event," Sweat adds. "In addition, we'd like to see it grow from the 50-60 colleges, universities and businesses that have currently signed up to be there. I believe that this event will be a won-

derful tool for both colleges and businesses to recruit their future employees and workforce."

"The planning of the event has been a group process, modeled after a similar event held in Lubbock," says Sweat. "We wanted to get something going like it in Amarillo to benefit the students in this region."

Event organizers anticipate that more than 2,000 sophomores from across the region will participate.

The Top of Texas Career Expo will be held on May 3rd at the West Texas A&M University campus Event Center in Canyon. Admission is free and open to all sophomores in the ESC Region 16. For more information, contact Panhandle AHEC at 806.212.6180.

AHEC Health Career Summer Camp Applications Available

The West Texas AHEC Program will be hosting four Health Career Summer Camps in June and July. These four-day camps are geared to motivated students who are interested in learning more about health care careers. The camps offer hands-on activities including CPR/first aid certification, job shadowing, tours of area colleges and health professions training programs, and presentations that focus on the admissions process and financial aid opportunities for education.

Each camp costs \$50, which includes program activities, as well as

room and board in the local college dormitory. Scholarships are available based on financial need. Applications are available from each regional AHEC center and will be online soon.



• Panhandle area: June 5-8 on the West Texas A&M campus in Canyon. www.panhandleahec.org

• Permian Basin area: June 26-29 on the Midland College campus. www.permianbasinahec.org

• Big Country area: July 10-13 on the McMurry University campus in Abilene. www.bigcountryahec.org

• South Plains area: July 5-8 on South Plains College campus in Levelland. www.ahecplains.org

New Director Heads Permian Basin AHEC

Permian Basin AHEC welcomed a new center director to the staff in February 2006. Elisa Williford, who previously served as the AHEC's health career promotions coordinator,



is now the center director for the Midland-based AHEC office.

"I am excited about this position and look forward to

helping the West Texas AHEC program meet its goals this year in the Permian Basin region," says Williford. "My aim is to get the word out to the rural areas to let them know how we can help them and to work on establishing partnerships to improve communities' health."

Having grown up in the small town of Marathon in the Big Bend National Park area, Williford is accustomed to the challenges of living in a rural area. "We used to have to travel 30 miles just to get groceries or visit the doctor in nearby Alpine," she recalls, "and when my family moved to Odessa, my high school class grew from 13 to 756. The size of the class was a shock, but it was great training for college."

Her teenage years were spent as an athlete and, in high school, Williford, whose maiden name was Martinez, was the state 1A champion for the 400 meters with a time of 56.2 sec-

onds—a track record that stood for an astonishing 27 years until 2004. Even more astonishing, Williford was coming down with mumps that day. "I thought it was about time for the record to be broken," she admits with a smile. "It was time for someone new to come in and take it, and I am glad they did."

After accepting a full-ride athletic scholarship to Texas Woman's University and running at the collegiate level for four years, Williford earned her Bachelor's degree in Physical Education and Health. In addition to teaching, Williford also has administration experience in the university setting. In 2000, she finally came home to the Midland-Odessa area.

Williford has now retired from running due to a chronic injury, but she still rides her bicycle, walks and hikes when she can. "I really enjoy getting out and about and being active," she said. "Once an athlete, always an athlete after all."

As for her job, Williford is happy with her promotion with the Permian Basin AHEC.

"I like what I do: meeting people and being able to help them with their needs. It's so helpful to be able to point out to people that health careers offer a wide variety of opportunities that don't require a four-year degree," she adds. "Many people are not aware of



Above: In 1977, Elisa Martinez Williford set the state 1A record for 400 meters.

all the options that only require a few months to a couple of years of education.

"I wish someone had come and talked to me when I was in Marathon and shown me all these opportunities in the health care field. I had no idea they were out there when I was younger. Now, I enjoy helping people realize these opportunities are available for them when perhaps they didn't know before."

West Texas AHEC Welcomes New Staff

The West Texas AHEC Program welcomes four new staff members to its team.

New health careers promotions coordinators include Courtney McVey at the Permian Basin AHEC and Camy Brunson at AHEC of the Plains.

New community-based education coordinators include Vickie Foster at Permian Basin AHEC and Erin Jarry at Panhandle AHEC.



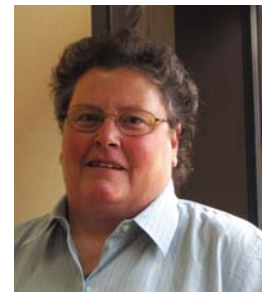
Brunson



McVey



Jarry



Foster

Eat Fruits and Vegetables for Health

Spring is here, and this means that a great selection of fresh produce is now available. Government recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) suggest 5-9 servings of fruits and vegetables every day, but the average American only eats 3-4 servings. This serving recommendation reflects the growing research that underscores the importance of eating fruit and vegetables regularly.



Depending on your caloric needs, the guidelines suggest that you choose 2-4 servings of fruit and 3-5 servings of vegetables each day. Fruits and veggies are a valuable source of vitamins, minerals and fiber that your body needs to stay healthy.

Most fruits and vegetables are low in calories and fat, and they contain lots of water and fiber to help you feel full and to help your digestion system work better.. Fresh produce has been found to lower your risk of digestive and respiratory cancers, to lower your risk of heart disease, to decrease your blood pressure, and to help you manage your weight more effectively.

The National Cancer Institute recommends eating a variety of fruits and vegetables, so try eating from the different color groups regularly:

- Green: leafy greens, spinach, broccoli, green pepper, green cabbage
- Orange/Yellow: carrots, sweet potatoes, squash, citrus fruits
- Red: tomatoes, spaghetti sauces, red apples, pink grapefruit etc
- Blue/Purple: eggplant, purple grapes, plums, raisins
- White: cauliflower, mushrooms, onions, garlic, bananas, pears

So how can you increase your intake?

Make fruits and vegetables the focus of your meal rather than the side dish. Have a piece of fresh fruit for dessert. Try new types of fruit and vegetables. Eat fruit for snacks during the day. Increase the size of your salad. Have fruit juice for breakfast. The list can be endless.

So this Spring, adopt a new habit: eat your 5-a-day every day!

April 11	Adult/Child Protective Services and 211 Information Seminar	Sweetwater, TX Contact: Mike Nall, Big Country
April 15	Rural Health Scholarship application, undergraduate TTU deadline	www.ttuhscc.edu/ruralhealth
April 18-19	Understanding Infant Adoption	Amarillo, TX Contact: Erin Jarry, Panhandle
April 21-22	Advanced Cardiac Life Support	Odessa, TX Contact: Vickie Foster, Permian
April 22	Advances in Cardiology for the Primary Care Provider	Odessa, TX Contact: Vickie Foster, Permian
April 26-27	Trauma Nurse Core Curriculum	Lubbock, TX Contact: Jessica Patton, Plains
April 28-29	Pediatric Life Support	Odessa, TX Contact: Vickie Foster, Permian
May 2 & 4	Electronic Fetal Monitoring	Odessa, TX Contact: Vickie Foster, Permian
May 3	Top of Texas Career Expo	Amarillo, TX Contact: Tommy Sweat, Panhandle
May 11	Colorectal Cancer	Lubbock, TX Contact: Jessica Patton, Plains
May 18-19	Trauma Nurse Core Curriculum	Lubbock, TX Contact: Jessica Patton, Plains
June 6-7	Understanding Infant Adoption	Lubbock, TX Contact: Jessica Patton, Plains
June 13	Cardiac Rhythm Interpretation Course	Odessa, TX Contact: Vickie Foster, Permian
June 28	S.T.A.B.L.E. (Stabilizing Newborns)	San Angelo, TX Contact: Vickie Foster, Permian
June 21-22, 28-29	Bereavement Care Advocacy Training	Odessa, TX Contact: Vickie Foster, Permian
July 8	Lab Values	San Angelo, TX Contact: Vickie Foster, Permian

AHEC of the Plains 806.291.0101 Big Country AHEC 325.793.8484
Panhandle AHEC 806.212.6180 Permian Basin AHEC 432.685.8306



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