

Rural Health *Messenger*

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New Texas Tech Chancellor a strong supporter of rural health initiatives

The new chancellor for Texas Tech University System has many priorities on his plate, including improving health care for West Texas.

Chancellor Kent Hance, who started on December 1, understands rural West Texas more than most people. Not only has he served as the state senator and congressman for Lubbock and the South Plains, he was born and raised in Dimmitt.



Hance

“I have spent time in just about every town and cotton gin in West Texas. I grew up

here,” says Hance. “I understand the people and their needs. I also understand that access to health care is critical to the future economy of West Texas. That is why the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center was established. It will be one of my priorities that the Health Sciences Center remain strong in its efforts to provide doctors, nurses, and other health providers for West Texas.”

Hance also applauded the efforts of the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health with its programs ranging from promoting health careers among rural high school students to telemedicine to researching ways to make rural Texans healthier.

Dr. Patti Patterson, vice president

for Rural and Community Health at TTUHSC is excited about the appointment of Hance as chancellor.

“Chancellor Hance not only talks the talk – he walks the walk, which is important in West Texas,” she says. “As a state senator and congressman, he worked tirelessly to find support for the Health Sciences Center during its early years of existence. He understands what we are trying to do to improve health care access and the quality of life in West Texas. As we often say in West Texas: ‘He gets it!’”

Hance, most recently a practicing attorney in Austin, is a Texas Tech graduate and the third chancellor for the Texas Tech University System.

New legislative session brings fresh look at rural health issues

This month, the new legislative process begins with the 110th Congress and the 80th session of the Texas Legislature. With the seating of the new sessions, new opportunities exist for rural health care, although many of the focus issues carry forward from previous sessions.

Dave Pearson, president/CEO of the Texas Organization for Rural Community Hospitals (TORCH) explains, “With the new session, the situation is different because we currently have approximately a \$5 billion budget surplus in Texas, which the Legislature can use if they choose to vote to break the spending cap.

“Recent sessions have been conducted in a defensive mode, requiring cuts which first impact health and human services. This year, there may be some opportunity to restore some of those cuts.”

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

Advocacy a key to rural health

Addressing the health care and economic challenges facing rural communities is an ongoing process that requires constant attention at many levels—local, state and federal. It also requires partnerships that create opportunities no single entity could accomplish on its own.



Communities must be proactive in seeking out innovative ways to address their local and regional health care concerns—and many are making great strides to improve the health status of their citizens. Our “Focus on Community” feature highlights these communities’ efforts.

In addition to identifying and addressing local needs, communities must be involved in the broader process of advocacy. According to Webster, an advocate is “one who pleads in favor of, or on behalf of, another.” We all have had experience as advocates at one time or another.

The first step to being a good advocate is to understand what you need to advocate for. Organizations like the National Rural Health Association, Texas Rural Health Association, Texas Organization for Rural Community Hospitals and the Texas Association of Rural Health Clinics are involved in researching the issues and understanding their impact on rural communities.

Why is advocacy important for rural communities? Representation in Congress and the state legislature is based on population. As urban and suburban populations increase, and therefore rural populations decrease, rural representation also decreases—making it more important for rural residents to communicate with their legislators about rural-focused issues. It is also important for urban-based legislators to understand how rural issues impact their own communities and constituents.

The keys to improving health for rural Texans range from local need-based initiatives to broader efforts to become a part of the legislative process. And in both instances, it is the efforts of individuals that have great impact.

Still waiting for the flu pandemic?

With the calendar marching into 2007, the much talked about flu pandemic has yet to materialize. A few more pages have been torn from the calendar and many people remain wondering if this is a case of “crying wolf” or a vision of bored scientists in search of something to worry about. Despite early predictions being premature, conventional wisdom from scientists and physicians is that a flu pandemic could still be on the horizon. Back in the summer, there was heavy discussion of the potential pandemic in the news media. At the same time, health experts were clear that it could come as early as the fall of 2006, but it would more likely occur in the spring of 2007, or even in 2008.

The driving factor in dropping from the news headlines is that the spread of the bird flu strain H5N1, which many believe could be the precursor to a human flu pandemic strain, has remained contained in Asia and parts of Europe. Despite the slow spread and the almost non-news coverage, the bird flu is still moving. Recent cases in Korea have resulted in more than 100,000 chickens being killed that potentially came in contact with other flu virus infected poultry. Korea is now discussing killing dogs and cats that might become infected.

Although the threat seems to have subsided, local community leaders and health officials need to remain vigilant. The start of a wide spread flu pandemic in the United States will become imminent when and if the current bird flu strain transfers to humans and people in this country become infected. If that scenario evolves to reality, the public health alarm will sound quickly and it will be too late to prepare.

In the meantime, the lull allows communities more time to prepare. Many health and community officials have not completed planning activities, and many others have not started. There are many more resources now available for information on pandemic flu planning.

The best protection remaining for everyone is individual and family planning. The CDC suggests that all families have the following in their homes for a flu pandemic and other potential disasters

- Ready-to-eat, non-perishable food and beverages
- Prescribed medicines and supplies
- Remedies for flu symptom relief, including anti-diarrheal medication, fluids with electrolytes, and medicines for fever
- Soap and cleaning supplies
- Toilet tissue

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) maintains checklists at www.pandemicflu.gov which can serve as a starting point for plan development.

New legislative session, cont'd from page 1

According to Pearson, the rural-focused issues that TORCH is monitoring include improvements in Medicaid eligibility and reimbursement, how to address the issue of uninsurance which impacts more than 25% of the population, and how to enhance recruiting efforts in areas where it is difficult to recruit physicians.

Much of what happens at the state level is driven by policies implemented in Congress. “With the shift in power in Congress, everything is up in the air,” says Ramsey Longbotham, executive director of the Texas Association of Rural Health Clinics. “A change in leadership opens the door for new ears to listen to the issues facing rural communities.”

Longbotham adds, “On the federal side, the key issues for rural health are associated with changes to Medicare, which affects not only individuals, but also rural hospitals and rural health clinics.”

For more information about rural issues, visit

- TORCH at www.torchnet.org/
- Texas Association of Rural Health Clinics at www.torchnet.org/tarhc/
- Texas Rural Health Association at www.trha.org and
- National Rural Health Association at www.nrha.org.

Double T Health Service Corps increases opportunities for students to get involved in community

Recent research shows that the current generation of college students is more interested in doing volunteer work and helping to make a difference in their own communities than previous generations. This motivation is being reflected in the membership of the Double T Health Service Corps. The organization now has more than 120 members, which has enabled the Corps to have a greater impact in the community to do a wide variety of volunteer projects this fall, ranging from building houses for Habitat for Humanity to hosting educational booths at several health and career fairs.

Beginning in the Spring, members will have opportunity to develop more extensive service projects, including applying for grant funds to implement projects in partnership with community organizations.

"I am excited to be involved with such a growing organization and have big goals for it in the near future," says

Heath Cotter, a fourth-year medical student and president of the organization. "I would like us to continue to grow so we can enhance our outreach to underserved groups of people in Lubbock and the surrounding areas."

Members have chosen four priority areas to focus on this school year:

- health services/health promotion,
- community improvement,
- underserved populations and health disparities, and
- youth mentorship and career development.

Each priority area has a student leader and student members who participate in developing service projects to meet those needs.

Josh Nunez, a senior undergraduate at Texas Tech University, is the Corps'



Above: Members of the Health Service Corps participated in two Habitat for Humanity builds this fall.

secretary and chair of the underserved populations/health disparities group.

"I wanted to join because of the focus on health disparities and underserved populations," he explains. "I wanted to get hands-on experience and to feel a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment in working with these groups. With the volunteer projects that we do, I get that."

The Corps, formerly known as the Student Rural Health Organization (SRHO), has expanded this fall enabling it to increase its impact into underserved urban and rural areas and to serve more people. Students have embraced the concept, as evidenced by the increase in membership, particularly from the undergraduate Texas Tech University campus. The goal is to create an organization that fosters college students' growth as community leaders to improve community health.



Above: The Health Service Corps participated in the Littlefield Health Fair, encouraging kids and their parents with ideas for good nutrition and ways to increase physical activity. **Right:** Health Service Corps students taught high school juniors how to do sutures, promoting health careers at the South Plains Career Expo.



Rural Assistance Center aids communities

It can be an ongoing challenge to find resources to assist in providing health care in rural areas, but help is out there in the form of the Rural Assistance Center (www.raconline.org).

Services on this website are free of charge and include information on topics such as funding opportunities, a searchable resource database, publications and maps, as well as success stories from others to offer inspiration. Additionally, the Center offers information specialists who can provide free customized assistance to help identify funding opportunities just right for your community, find any print and electronic documents, and locate appropriate federal and state agency contacts.

The Rural Assistance Center is a collaboration of the University of North Dakota Center for Rural Health, the Rural Policy Research Institute, and the federal Office of Rural Health Policy (ORHP) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 3

Telemedicine Report

Advanced Health Care Through Advanced Technology

Telemedicine improves access to oncology care for rural community

Many cancer and oncology patients in the Childress area will soon benefit from the newest Texas Tech telemedicine project. The Fox Clinic at Childress Regional Medical Center, 150 miles northeast of Lubbock, is being electronically linked to Lubbock for oncology care. Patients in the Panhandle community of 6,700 who regularly visit Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC) and its affiliated teaching hospital, the University Medical Center's Southwest Cancer Center, in Lubbock for cancer treatment will soon make some of their visits virtual with telemedicine and reduce the number of driving trips.

"Most cancer care requires treatment two or three times a week in a large city like Lubbock," explains Dr. John Henderson of Childress. "We are a two-and-a-half hour drive away from Lubbock where most cancer treatment happens, so it can be very draining for patients. Travel can be very difficult for this population and it can be overwhelming to go from a small rural town to a large city for health care. We do have instances of people dropping out of treatment because of that."

Don McBeath, director of telemedicine for Texas Tech adds, "The new telemedicine link which goes live in January will not eliminate all trips back to Lubbock, but it will certainly reduce the number, yet maintain access to quality health care. Texas Tech has long used telemedicine to enhance access to health care in West Texas. This new oncology program is very exciting for us."

The new project will also assist Texas Tech physicians and students in learning the full capabilities of using telemedicine with cancer patients. The primary uses anticipated are pre-conferences with the oncologist – a virtual introduction – as well as follow-up visits.

"The telemedicine clinic will give our patients better access to care and also provide better coordination of care, since the family medicine physician can be in the consult as well to hear what the care plan is," says Henderson. "This provides a strong link between the consulting oncologist in Lubbock and the physician in the rural area which, in the end, improves the care for the patient." The Childress physicians will also link into their patients' medical records at the Southwest Cancer Center at University Medical Center.

"We are very excited about this telemedicine clinic to improve the care of our patients and are grateful to TTUHSC



Above and Right:

Dr. John Henderson, who has practiced medicine in Childress, Texas for 28 years and Ladonna Willis, discuss how the telemedicine link will benefit local oncology patients with Dr. Everardo Cobos, chief of Hematology and Oncology and medical director of the Southwest Cancer Treatment and Research Center.



for their support," says Henderson. "It will really help our cancer patients."

Over time, additional specialty care services that may not be available in Childress will also be delivered via the new telemedicine link. Texas Tech officials say if the oncology care works as planned, those services may also be expanded to other locations.

EXPORT study focuses on childhood obesity

The West Texas Rural EXPORT Center is sponsoring an innovative multidisciplinary research project led by two Texas Tech University faculty members, Marc Lochbaum, from the Department of Health, Exercise and Sports Sciences (College of Arts and Sciences) and Tara Stevens, from the Department of Educational Psychology (College of Education). While there is a great deal of information available regarding the long-term health effects of childhood obesity, these researchers are measuring the influence of overweight and obesity on student attendance, behavior and academic performance.

By collecting and analyzing data from kindergarten, fifth and ninth grade students in rural West Texas schools, Drs. Lochbaum and Stevens hope to identify trends that influence student fitness, nutrition and health status. From these trends the researchers will seek factors that may be driving the obesity epidemic at the individual, family, school and com-

Right: Drs. Tara Stevens and Marc Lochbaum are leading a multidisciplinary study to determine the impact that overweight and obesity have on students' behavior and academic performance.

munity levels. "This study is designed to measure the impact of physical activity and obesity on the student's self-perception," explains Dr. Lochbaum, "and to understand how those changes may influence academic participation and achievement."

EXPORT, standing for Excellence in Partnerships for Community Outreach, Research on Health Disparities and Training, is a research initiative of the National Institutes of Health. Dr. Patti Patterson, principal investigator of the EXPORT grant, says that the work of Drs. Lochbaum and Stevens will produce useful knowledge on complex physical, mental, emotional, social, and



spiritual interactions that both lead to and result from childhood obesity.

"Students, and their parents and teachers, will benefit from the working relationships that Professors Lochbaum and Stevens are developing in rural schools. Their research findings will improve our understandings of how important physical activity is to the long-term well-being of students."

Focus On

COMMUNITY HEALTH

In West Texas, health care and social services resources are often scarce, and it only makes sense for communities to work together in a collaborative manner to make the most of shared resources. The counties of Dickens, Kent, Stonewall, Fisher and Jones all work together in the Mesquite Plains Rural Health Network (MPRHN), a collaborative effort that has resulted in the counties receiving a one-year grant focused on substance abuse prevention, intervention and awareness across the area.

According to Shalena Hodge, administrator for Stonewall Memorial Hospital and chair of the MPRHN, the Network completed a needs assessment of most of the counties and determined a number of issues to focus on, including substance abuse prevention, intervention and awareness. With this grant from the Office of Rural Community Affairs (ORCA), the Mesquite Plains Rural Health Network has enabled communities in these five counties to reach people in a wide variety of ways to help address the problem of substance abuse.

One of the projects collaborates with various partners including AHEC of the Plains, Big Country AHEC, Abilene Regional Council of Drug and Alcohol Abuse, and the Texas Department of State Health Services to develop an even stronger network and knowledge about available resources across the area. By working with these and a number of other partners, the Network has developed a rural resource directory with contact information and descriptions of the various services provided by different agencies.

Other activities include providing transportation vouchers to people who need help with getting to their substance abuse treatment, providing substance abuse training to the community, helping the different school districts address substance abuse training for their students and staff, and also working with the criminal justice system to explore ways the two groups could work together.

"I feel it's going very well," adds Hodge. "We're making great strides in developing networks to address problems. The more people you have working together, the better the opportunity to learn about the resources available to your community."



AHEC Update

WEST TEXAS AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTER PROGRAM

Health workforce diversity focus of regional conference series

The population of Texas is becoming more diverse. State demographer, Steve Murdock projects by the year 2040 the population of Texas is expected to increase 68% – from 20.8 million to 35 million people – and 96% of this growth is expected to be in the non-Anglo populations.

Despite the increase in population, the number of students completing their high school education would decrease, according to Murdock, leaving Texas with a less-skilled work force than we have today. West Texas already lags behind the rest of the state in all levels of education completed, so unless something is done, the situation will only worsen.

While the concerns related to a skilled workforce broadly cover all industries, of particular concern is the impact to the health care workforce for the state. Currently, African Americans and Hispanics are underrepresented in the state's health care workforce and in health professions training programs. Rural and economically disadvantaged students also face barriers to training beyond high school.

If the trend continues in this fashion, the health care workforce will not be representative of the larger population, and there will continue to be a significant shortage of health care professionals to take care of the health needs of an increasingly elderly and diverse population.

“Fostering the preparation of underrepresented students for training beyond high school, and then facilitating their transition through health professions training programs and into the health care workforce is crucial to addressing the health care workforce shortage that Texas faces,” says Pam Danner, director of the West Texas Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Pro-

gram with the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center.

In addition, numerous studies have shown that diversity improves access to health care for underserved patients. According to the Institute of Medicine (IOM), racial and ethnic minority health care providers are more likely to serve minority and medically underserved communities. And from an educational perspective, the IOM notes that diversity in higher education and health professions training settings is associated with better educational outcomes for all students, not just those from minority backgrounds.

The Health Sciences Center has been working for several years to increase underserved students' access to—as well as successful completion of—health professions training.

As part of these ongoing efforts, the West Texas AHEC, East Texas AHEC and South Texas AHEC have partnered together to host a series of statewide Health Workforce Diversity Regional Conferences funded by a grant through the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Each conference will address the



needs of specific population groups, regional demographics and health care workforce issues, and provide opportunities for participants to begin the process for developing best practices to address these issues.

Organizers are currently offering a call for presentations (deadlines depend on specific conference date) and encouraging individuals to sign up to attend the conference in their region to collaborate on ways that stakeholders can work together.

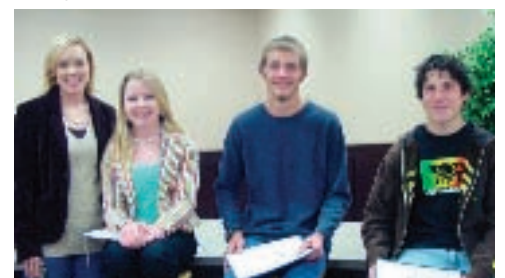
For more information, please go to the conference website at www.hwdc.org or call 512.472.8921.



Right: From left, Science fair winners: Amy Teeple (Floydada, teacher) and her student Hallie Bertrand (1st); Derek Harrell (2nd) of Plainview; and Jerrod Campbell (3rd) of Hale Center.

Science Fair in Plainview

Left: AHEC of the Plains and the Tri-County Medical Society (Hale, Floyd and Briscoe counties) hosted a successful first-ever science fair in Plainview on November 11. Twenty students from the three counties participated in the event.



Texas Tech Garrison Institute, AHEC partner together to provide rural caregiver training

With the population rapidly aging and all the increasing health challenges that go along with that, it is becoming more and more important to educate people about the art of caregiving, whether they are looking after a family member or a friend.

The Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center's Garrison Institute on Aging received a one-year grant to help provide a series of education seminars on caregiving topics to rural caregivers, using technology from the Region 17 Education Service Center and partnering with rural high schools and AHEC of the Plains to host local training events.

"We wanted to be able to reach rural residents to help with any caregiving problems they may be having," explains Ann Laurence, director of Education and Training for the Institute. "More and more people are having to look after elderly family members and they receive very little training. We hope to alleviate this situation by providing sessions on a variety of topics to help them learn how to cope more effectively."

The grant is provided by the Holloway Family Foundation in Dallas and allows the Garrison Institute and

its partners to implement a series of educational presentations on caregiving topics such as medication management, communicating with a person with dementia, and the Medicaid estate recovery program. Partners include the Area Agency on Aging, AHEC of the Plains, the Rolling Plains Educational Consortium, and rural high schools.

Each program is broadcast live once a month from the Education Service Center Region 17 in Lubbock to high schools in four rural communities, ready for residents to receive without having to travel far distances.

"The Education Service Center takes care of all the technological aspects and allows us to simultaneously reach more people using quality speakers from a variety of interdisciplinary backgrounds," explains Laurence. "This enables us to provide rural residents with high quality educational programs without them having to leave their rural towns."

The communities involved are Morton, Plainview, Floydada and Spur; each community has its own contact who helps with technological concerns and registration issues locally.

The AHEC of the Plains, located in Plainview, helps to facilitate the

presentations in Floydada and Plainview by making room arrangements, providing refreshments and handling registration.

"We are happy to help with this project to further educate our rural residents," reports Cindy Bureson, center director for AHEC of the Plains. "It's a program with so much potential, and we are excited to be a part of it."

"We couldn't have done it without AHEC of the Plains," says Laurence. "They have been very helpful in this project and we appreciate it."

The presentations have been held once a month through this past September, October, November and then January 2007. Once the programs have been completed, Laurence explains that they will hold face-to-face focus groups in each community to learn what components of the training positively impacted their effectiveness as caregivers.

"This is a valuable project as we are hoping to help reduce the isolation in these rural towns for the caregivers who live there," adds Laurence. "The general consensus is that it has been very successful so far."

For more information about caregiver resources in West Texas, go to www.westtexascare.org.



2007 Health Workforce Diversity Regional Conferences

hosted by the Texas AHECs
East Texas AHEC • West Texas AHEC • South Texas AHEC

Conferences will be held across Texas bringing together stakeholders of K-12 and higher education; health workforce development and employment; health care industries; federal, state, and community organizations; and health workforce policy to understand

- the impact of our state's demographics on health workforce
- the opportunities to expand diversity and
- strategies to assist students with completion of training and improve workforce retention.

To register or submit a presentation proposal, go to www.hwdc.org.

Caring for the Caregiver



Caregivers play a tremendous role to meet the health, safety, welfare and daily living needs of family and friends who are not able to care for themselves. Caregivers can live near or far away—anyone who provides regular assistance to a loved one, whether it is parent, friend or even grandchild, can consider themselves to be a caregiver.

According to the National Family Caregivers Association (NFCA), more than one quarter of the adult population has provided care for a chronically ill, disabled, or aged family member or friend during the past year. And caregiving is no longer predominantly a women's issue; men now make up 44% of the caregiving population.

Caregiving is not an easy responsibility, requiring care givers to juggle work and family—and often to make sacrifices in their personal lives to care for the needs of others. It can often become an emotional drain for families if they do not have an adequate support system to help with providing care.

If you are a care giver, there are some tips from NFCA to help you maintain balance and emotional wellbeing in your life:

- Choose to take charge of your life, and don't let your loved one's illness or disability always take center stage.
- Remember to be good to yourself. You are doing a hard job and deserve some quality time just for you.
- Watch out for signs of depression, and don't delay in getting professional help when you need it.
- There is a difference between caring and doing. Be open to ideas that promote your loved one's independence.
- Educate yourself about your loved one's condition.
- When people offer to help, accept the offer and suggest specific things that they can do.
- Seek support from other caregivers. There is strength in knowing that you are not alone.

For more information about caregiver support in Texas, go to

- www.ttuhscc.edu/centers/aging
- www.westtexascares.com and
- www.dads.state.tx.us/index.cfm.

Upcoming Events

Jan 5-6	Advanced Cardiac Life Support	Andrews, TX Contact: Cleveland Phelps, Permian
Jan 9	Caregiver Training. 4:00 pm	Morton, Plainview, Floydada, Spur Contact: Ann Laurence, 806.743.7821
Jan 19-20	Advanced Cardiac Life Support	Alpine, TX Contact: Cleveland Phelps, Permian
Jan 31	Nurse Physician Communication*	Lubbock, TX Contact: Brandi McKinney, Plains
Feb 2	Coping with Difficult People*	Junction, TX Contact: Carolyn Brackett, 806.743.2734
Feb 2-3	Pediatric Advanced Life Support	Alpine, TX Contact: Cleveland Phelps, Permian
Feb 5	Health Workforce Diversity Regional Conference	Dallas, TX Contact: Thanh Dao Whatley DFW AHEC. 214.648.8336
Feb 23	Common Infection Control Issues in Long Term Care*	Location TBA Contact: Ann Laurence. 806.743.7821
Mar 1	11th Annual Nurse Practitioner Workshop*	Lubbock, TX Contact: Carolyn Brackett, 806.743.2734
Mar 6	Health Workforce Diversity Regional Conference	Lubbock, TX Contact: Shannon Kirkland, 806.743.1338
Mar 8	Death and Dying*	Lamesa, TX Contact: Heidi Cobb, 806.872.2183
Mar 21-23	29th Institute on Substance Abuse and Addiction*	Lubbock, TX Contact: Shelley Burson, 806.743.2732
Mar 30	Advanced Certified Nurse Aide Training	Big Spring, TX Contact: Ann Laurence, 806.743.7821
Apr 15	Texas Tech Rural Health Education Undergraduate Scholarship deadline	www.ttuhscc.edu/ruralhealth

*Provided by TTUHSC CNE Program. www.ttuhscc.edu/son/cne/

AHEC of the Plains 806.291.0101 Big Country AHEC 325.793.8484
Panhandle AHEC 806.651.3480 Permian Basin AHEC 432.685.8306

Vist our websites at www.westtexasahec.org
and www.ttuhscc.edu/ruralhealth.



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER

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