

The Rural and Community Health Messenger

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School of Pharmacy, West Texas AHEC get grant to expand HOT Jobs

The Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Pharmacy (TTUHSC SOP) and the West Texas Area Health Education Center (AHEC) have been awarded a \$342,000, 2-year grant from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to develop a health careers website geared toward meeting the informational needs of minority and underserved students. The grant is part of the Minority Health Research and Education Grant Program.

Craig Cox, PharmD, BCPS, the principal investigator for the grant, explains, "This will be a great opportunity to expand a website that was developed by the Texas Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) to help stimulate student and family interest in health careers. We are hoping through this process that a greater understanding of healthcare fields will be achieved, allowing individuals to make more informed decisions about their career paths."

With this award, the Texas HOT Jobs website (www.texashotjobs.org) will aim to meet the diverse needs of three different audiences: career seekers, parents and families, and educators. It will be a collaborative effort

between the Texas Tech University College of Mass Communications, Lubbock Independent School District, AHEC of the Plains, East Texas AHEC, West Texas AHEC, and TTUHSC SOP.

To determine the needs of these audiences, focus groups of students and parents will discuss potential areas of need. Following that, a statewide survey of students and educators will be completed to test multiple areas of awareness and effectiveness of current messages and strategy, to assess perceptions of Hispanic and other underserved students and their families regarding health care professions, and to gauge opinions about familial support for careers in the health care industry.

These assessment tools will provide the foundation for meeting the target population's needs by:

- Developing an easy-to-understand guide, as well as interactive checklists, for families to navigate educational opportunities beyond high school.
- Creating a Spanish-language version of key content.



- Developing a health professional "role model" section for career seekers to learn from and be encouraged by the experiences of current professionals in the field.

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Institute names new director of research, collaboration provides opportunities to expand rural health studies

Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC) is launching phase two of the Cochran County Aging Study under the direction of Dr. Sid O'Bryant, new director of Research for the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health. O'Bryant is an assistant professor in the TTUHSC department of Neuropsychiatry.

The Cochran County Aging Study began in early 2006 to examine the issues of cognitive decline, Alzheimer's disease and other dementia syndromes in a rural aging population. More than 300 residents in Cochran County participate in this collaborative study.

"The Cochran County study is unique," says O'Bryant, "because very little information is available on the health care needs of the rural aging population. Over the course of this study, we expect to be able to add to that knowledge."

Phase two of the study, now in development, is the result of the collaborative efforts of the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health, the Garrison Institute on Aging, the Department of Neuropsychiatry, the South Plains Alcohol and Addiction Research Center (SPAARC), the Laura W. Bush Institute for Women's Health, the School of Nursing and the Department of Family Medicine.

"Dr. O'Bryant's Cochran County Aging Study is a model for rural health research. He will help to attract the expertise of other investigators in rural health studies," says Dr. Steven Berk, dean for the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center's School of Medicine. "Dr O'Bryant's ties to the Garrison Institute, the SPAARC group and the Laura W. Bush Institute for Women's Health will provide an exciting synergy for research collaboration."

In the second phase, which will provide a more detailed examination of risk factors affecting cardiovascular and cognitive health of the rural aging population, study participants will receive a free medical exam, in-depth assessment of cardiovascular risk factors, and detailed testing of memory and thinking.

For phase two, O'Bryant expects to add 300 participants from Cochran County in each of the next two years as well as to expand the study to include participants from other West Texas counties. "In the next several years, it is our hope to have more than 20 counties participating in the study and to follow these participants for more than 10 years. The development of this broad study poises Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center to have one of the most extensive rural aging studies in the country."



SPAARC joins forces with F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health

The South Plains Alcohol and Addictive Research Center (SPAARC) has accepted an invitation to work alongside researchers at the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health to better understand the impact of alcohol in rural communities.

SPAARC researchers will gain access to data and biological material being collected prospectively from a 300-strong cohort in Cochran County. The cohort is currently being studied for links between cognitive changes and cardiovascular disease, but additions to the study will allow use of questionnaire to assess alcohol usage, with follow-up of selected individuals for a more in-depth assessment.

According to Dr. Sid O'Bryant, director of Research at the Institute, the cohorts being developed in Cochran and other West Texas counties should provide a wealth of preliminary data that can be used to answer important research questions regarding consequences of alcohol use on health during the aging process.

As part of the agreement, Dr. Gregory Schrimsher will serve as the SPAARC representative on the Research Advisory Committee for the Cochran County Aging Study that also currently includes representatives from the TTUHSC Garrison Institute on Aging, the Laura W. Bush Institute for Women's Health, and the School of Nursing as well as the Departments of Neuropsychiatry and Family Medicine.

For more information on these and other TTUHSC Institutes and Centers, visit www.ttuhscc.edu/centers/.



Rural Health Trifecta:
Collaborating to Make a Difference

August 5-7, 2008 • Hyatt Regency Austin

An annual conference of the:

- Texas Rural Health Association
- Texas Hospital Association and its Rural Hospital Constituency Section
- Office of Rural Community Affairs' Critical Access Hospitals

in cooperation with the Texas Organization of Rural & Community Hospitals

For conference details, visit www.trha.org.

Health professionals encouraged to become online role models for young health career seekers

The *Texas HOT Jobs: A Cool Guide to Health Careers* website will include a new feature section of online health professional role models. The purpose is for these role models to share information about their own path to a successful health career, which will encourage career seekers in their own goal setting and career development.

“We aim to create an extensive resource of role models. It is really important for young career seekers to identify with a role model in the health profession of their choice, but personal access to role models in the wide variety of health professions is often difficult for students who live in rural or underserved urban communities,” says Pam Danner, director of rural health and the West Texas AHEC Program at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center.

Health care professionals are encouraged to complete an online questionnaire about their own educational and professional experiences at www.texas-hot-jobs.org/rolemodels.asp.



Whiteface middle school students win awards in national science competition

Sixth graders at Whiteface Middle School made an impact this Spring in an online science, math and technology competition called ECYBERMISSION, with the Thrillers team winning an award in the Southwest U.S. region for Best Use of Math, Science & Technology.

The contest asks teams of 3-4 middle school students to choose a community problem and solve it using scientific methods.

Whiteface teachers have encouraged and supported student participation in ECYBERMISSION for the last few years, and their student teams have made appearances in the national championships four years in a row. This year's team, “the Thrillers,” did their community research project to study the effects that physical and mental activities, as well as a diet high in antioxidants, had on memory function. The team found that increased physical and mental activities and a diet high in antioxidants did improve memory function in rats. They are planning to expand their research and look at ways to implement what they found to benefit their community, and submit the expanded project for the competition next year.

“The teacher at Whiteface, Laura Wilbanks, approached me with the girls’ research ideas and asked me if I could mentor them on how to set up their research design,” says Dr. Sid O’Bryant, an assistant professor in the Department of Neuropsychiatry and director of research for the Institute for Rural and Community Health. “Working with these young students to learn what research is all about is the most fun I’ve ever had in research.”

In addition to “the Thrillers” team award, Whiteface middle school had three other teams win overall 2nd place awards in the Southwest/Pacific Region for projects called “Jumps & Bumps” (6th grade); “Gale Force” (8th grade); “Lunartics” (9th grade).

Whiteface students also took home awards for Benefit to the Community (6th grade, Helping Harvest); Best Application of Math, Science and Technology (7th grade, Silent Wings); and Innovation, Originality and Creativity (9th grade, Computer Chips).

In all, students at Whiteface won \$110,000 in the ECYBERMISSION research competition this year.

“Our students are very excited about science, and participating in this kind of competition really engages them in learning about research and applying research to meet community needs,” says Laura Wilbanks, science coordinator at Whiteface Elementary School.

HOT Jobs website expansion cont'd from page 1

- Expanding interactive preparation content for career seekers.

The new interactive career develop content will expand the Personal Career Profile Manager, as well as add approximately 20 interactive health-based modules that utilize skills in critical thinking, math and science. These modules will help students understand the link between these subjects and various health careers; facilitate students’ development of healthful choices in areas like nutrition and exercise and develop their understanding of risk factors for diseases that are of public health concern (obesity, diabetes, etc).

“We believe that this expansion will create a tremendous resource for young career seekers,” says Shannon Kirkland, assistant director of the West Texas AHEC Program at TTUHSC. The effectiveness of the new content in meeting the needs of the target audiences will be evaluated by surveys of website users issued pre- and post-implementation of expansion. Expansion of the website is expected to be complete in August 2009.

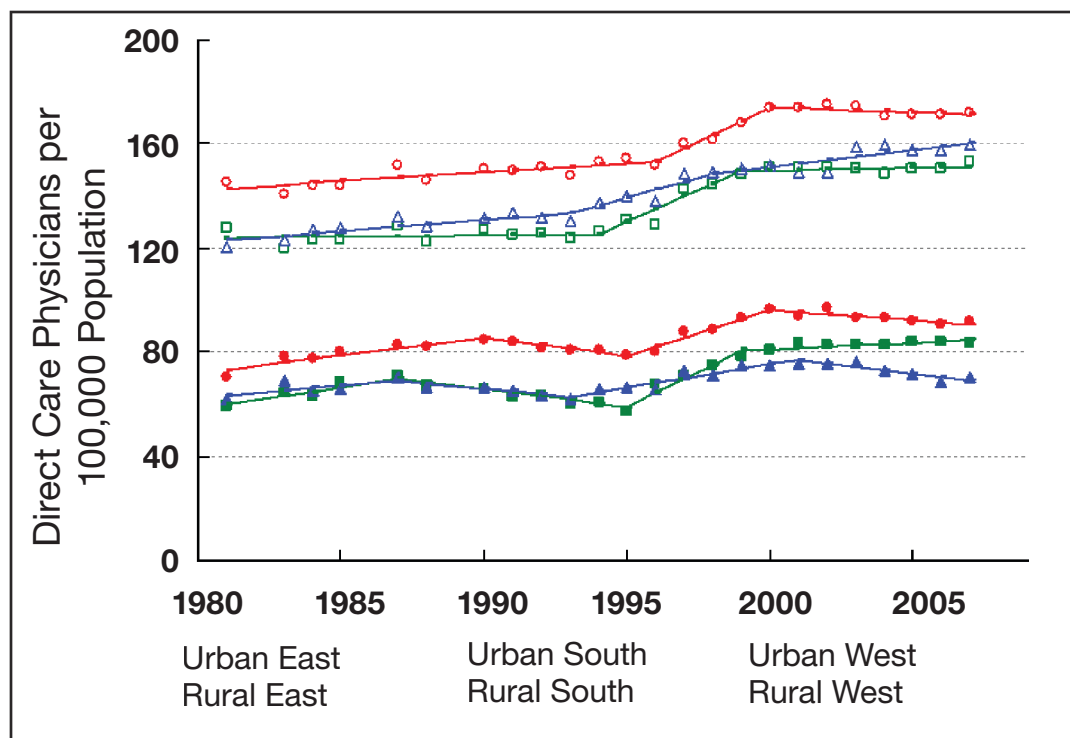
The Texas HOT Jobs, which includes both a book and online resource, was developed by the Texas Area Health Education Centers and their partners more than ten years ago and is the only comprehensive health career resource of its kind in Texas. For more information about Texas HOT Jobs, contact Shannon Kirkland at 806.743.1338 or Shannon.kirkland@ttuhsc.edu.

Physician supply trends show continued need for rural-focused initiatives

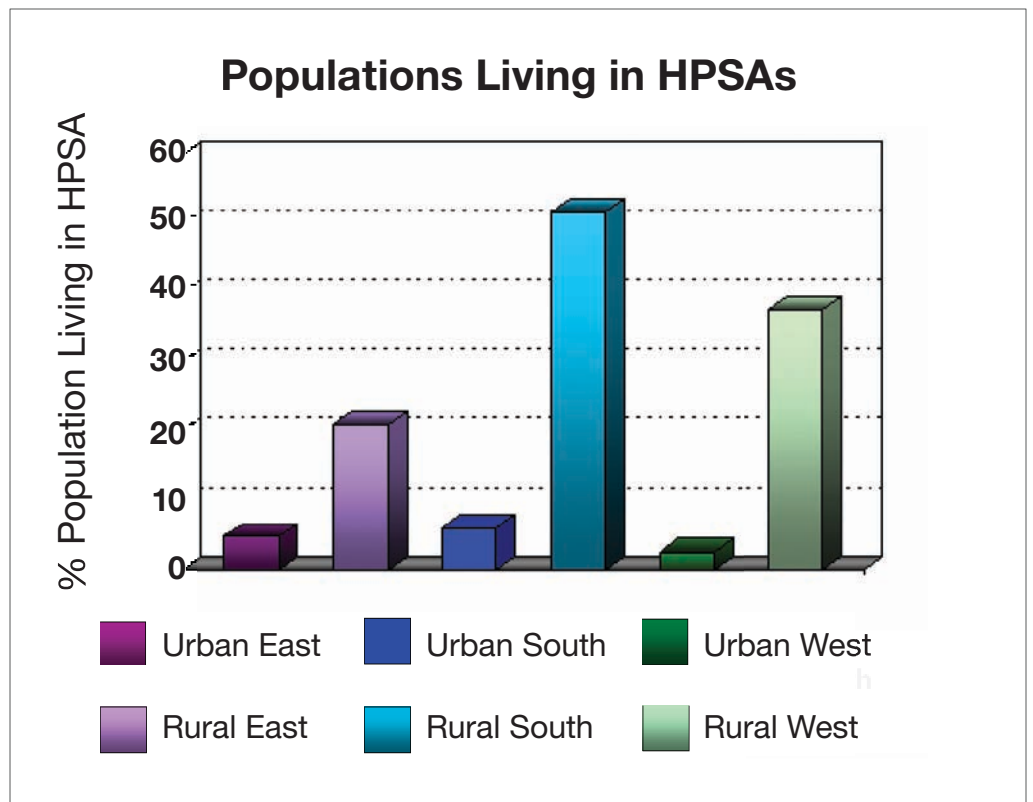
Investigation of the current status in the supplies of primary care physicians in the three larger regions in Texas is important for policy makers in their decisions to meet the demand of health care in these areas. However, little is known about the supplies of primary care physicians and direct care physicians in rural versus urban East, South and West Texas. The present studies were undertaken by Dr. Gordon Gong, director of Research Design and Biostatistical Analysis, to determine such supplies with special attention paid to the trends in order to project the future needs in these three large regions.

Results of this investigation showed that physician supply was significantly lower in West and South Texas than East Texas in both rural and urban areas with a trend of decrease or cessation during the past 5 to 10 years in all regions. Measures should be taken to eliminate health disparities in West and South Texas where the proportion of Hispanics is significantly higher than East Texas. Further investigations on regional difference in physician supply and in health disparity in other states will be considered in future studies.

Graph 2.



Graph 1.



Graph 1: In South, West and East Texas, 4.8%, 6.1%, and 2.5% of the urban population were living in Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA), respectively, while 51.7%, 37.5% and 20.9% of the rural populations were living in HPSAs, respectively. This suggests large disparities even among rural Texas regions.

Graph 2: The number of direct care physicians per 100,000 population was much lower in rural than in urban areas from 1981 to 2007) in all

the three regions of Texas (East, South and West). By the year of 2007, the numbers of direct care physicians per 100,000 in rural areas were about half of that their urban counterparts in the East (53%), the South (55%) and the West (44%). The ratio of direct care physicians to population was markedly higher in urban East Texas than in the other two urban regions where the ratio was slightly lower in the South than in the West over the years.

In rural Texas, the ratio of direct care physicians to population was also lower in the South and the West than in the East with a large gap. The ratio had been significantly lower in rural West than in rural South Texas from 1998 to 2007. The ratio tended to decrease or to cease to increase in most areas, rural or urban, starting around the year of 2000. Notably, the ratio showed a sharper decreasing trend in rural West (since 2001) and rural East (since 2000).

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TTUHSC faculty to pursue prestigious RWJ Scholars Program

Dr. Lara Johnson, an assistant professor of pediatrics at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, has been accepted into the Robert Wood Johnson (RWJ) Clinical Scholars Program. This selective program accepts up to 29 physicians each year.



Johnson

developed after I begin the program, but I'm very much interested in finding ways to improve pediatric outcomes in rural settings. And I plan to apply what I learn to benefit rural communities in West Texas, when I return to Texas Tech."

The program is hosted by RWJ at four sites: Yale University, University of California Los Angeles, University of Michigan and University of Pennsylvania.

Johnson's participation in the Clinical Scholarship Program is supported through a training stipend provided by the Department of Pediatrics and the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health.

The goal of the RWJ program is to develop future leaders who are able to conduct innovative research and work with communities, organizations, practitioners and policy makers on issues important to the health of Americans.

Johnson will be completing the two-year fellowship at Yale University.

"My research proposal is to look at quality of care in pediatric acute care in rural settings," Johnson says, "including differences in distances to tertiary care centers regionalization of care, and transport factors.

"The focus of my research will be

Summer health careers camps hosted by AHEC

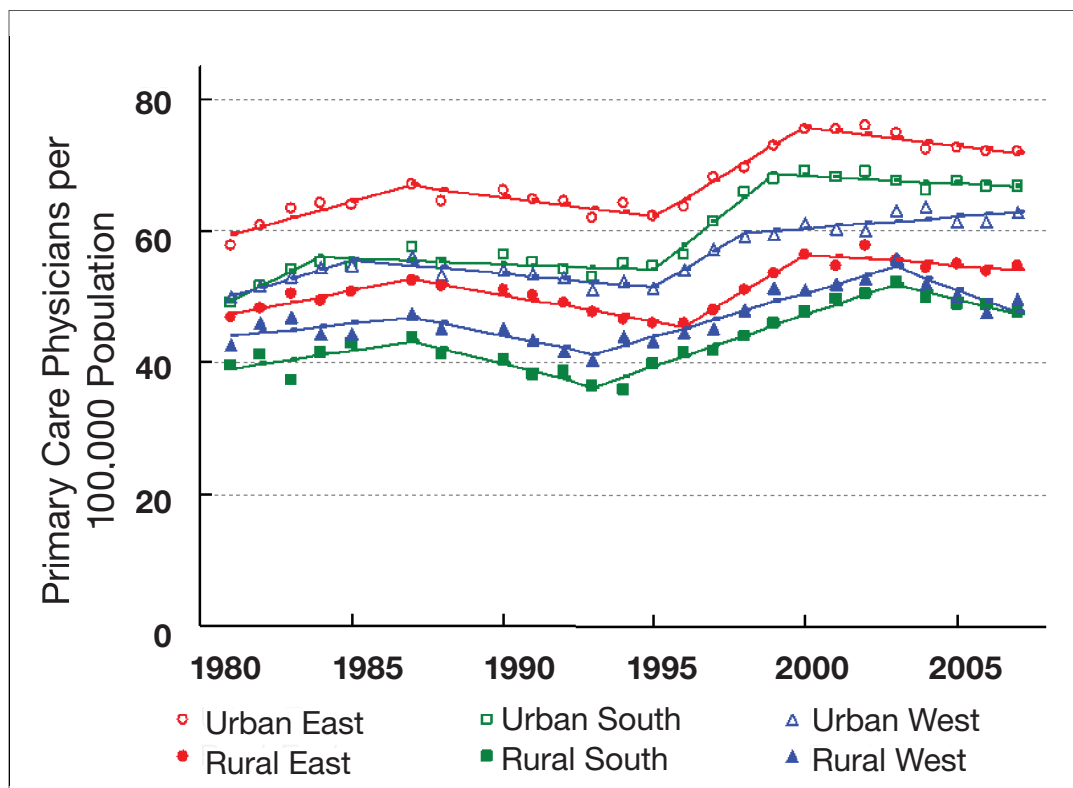
The regional West Texas Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) hosted 74 high school students at their annual health careers summer camps in Abilene, Canyon, Plainview and Stanton held in June.

These 4-day, 3-night camps were open to high school students across the region who are interested in exploring opportunities in health careers.

"The purpose for the camps is to give students a chance to 'try on' different health careers and see what might be a good fit," says Kelly Cheek, center director at the Big Country AHEC.

Students at each of the four camps had an opportunity to shadow health care professionals at work, to tour health care facilities and regional health care training programs including Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center. See page 8 for photos.

Graph 3.



Graph 3: The number of primary care physicians per 100,000 residents in the population was in the following order: urban East, urban South, urban West, rural East, rural West and

rural South Texas in general over the years from 1981 to 2007. By 2007, the numbers of primary care physicians per 100,000 were 32.1%, 40.0% and 26.1% lower in rural East, rural South

and rural West Texas, respectively, than their urban counter parts. In all these three regions of Texas, rural or urban, the supplies of primary care physicians showed an almost parallel change in trend: two increasing trends, each followed by a decreasing one.

Specifically, after an initial increasing trend in the early 1980s, the ratio of primary care physicians to population was decreasing till mid 1990s which was followed by a sharp increase till the year around 2000 in each of the areas in Texas. Subsequently, a decreasing trend was observed in urban and rural East (from 2000 to 2007), urban South (from 1999 to 2007), rural South and rural West (from 2003 to 2007). Although the ratio of primary care physician to population in urban West Texas showed an increasing trend from 1998 to 2003, the ratio ceased to increase in urban Texas since 2003.



AHEC Update

WEST TEXAS AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTER PROGRAM

Through AHEC relationships, Spearman welcomes new physicians

Two physicians will soon be calling Spearman, Texas, home, thanks to the work of the Hansford County Hospital District (HCHD) and the Panhandle Area Health Education Center (AHEC).

The physicians, both residents at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC) in Amarillo, were introduced to the Spearman practice opportunities in August 2007 through the Panhandle AHEC's work to promote rural practice opportunities.

"Before attending HealthMATCH in Amarillo, the hospital district had been using recruiters without success for six months to find physicians," says Jerry Jasper, Hansford County Hospital District Administrator.

Jasper had also just returned to the Texas Panhandle that August from the Houston area. "For my family, it was a quality of life choice. Spearman is like the last remaining Mayberry type town."

Recruiting physicians was one of Jasper's first priorities. At HealthMATCH, he was introduced to Dr. Heath Cotter and later to Dr. Hasham through the Panhandle AHEC. Nine months later,

both physicians are on board.

Tommy Sweat, director of the Panhandle AHEC explains, "We work closely with communities and with the residency programs year-round to share information about practice opportunities," says Tommy Sweat, director of the Panhandle AHEC. "HealthMATCH is our annual rural recruiting event that gives communities a chance to come to the campus and interact face-to-face."

Dr. Muhammad Hasham, joined the health care team in Spearman in May 2008 and will be providing internal medicine and pediatric care.

Dr. Heath Cotter will finish his family medicine residency in two years and will move to Spearman in July 2010. Until then, the hospital district will pay Cotter a stipend while he completes his residency. Cotter will spend some time working in the hospital ER, which gives him the opportunity to get to know his future patients.

"The district has adopted the strat-



Above: Hansford County Hospital, Spearman, Texas

egy of long-term planning for their future physician workforce," adds Jasper. "A couple of years ago the community had the opportunity to hire an additional doctor who would have come to the community last year, but they did not pursue it. Not any more; the community is well-engaged in making plans now to meet our future needs."

Spearman is home to 3,500 people, and the hospital district also serves a larger area including the communities of Gruver and Morris. Spearman is home to a 25-bed critical access hospital, an 84-bed nursing home, two federally-designated rural health clinics, a physician's office, as well as home health care and hospice services.

Path to rural practice includes J-1 Visa Waiver

Dr. Muhammad Hasham is half a world away from his hometown in Pakistan, but he has found a new place to make home in the Texas Panhandle. In August 2007, Hasham contacted the Panhandle AHEC to find out about practice opportunities in the region. He visited a few rural communities and found Spearman to be the place he wanted to start his medical practice.

Hasham completed medical school and even practiced in Pakistan for two years, before coming to the United States. As a foreign medical graduate, he had to complete all of the exams necessary to receive a license in the United



Hasham

States before pursuing his research interests and residency training. He completed a residency in internal medicine and pediatrics at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in February, and is practicing in Spearman through the Conrad 30 J-1 Visa Waiver program. Hasham has also been involved in neonatology research.

(Neonatology is the branch of medicine concerned with the care, development, and diseases of newborn infants.)

"As a physician looking to start a new practice, I was hoping to find a community that is welcoming and where people are approachable. In Spearman, the people are really nice, and I felt very comfortable here," Hasham says.

"Through the Panhandle AHEC and the J-1 Visa Waiver program, I was able to find a great place to practice," he adds.

Hasham offers advice to other communities who are seeking to build

Rural Health Scholar's family medicine practice dreams realized

Heath Cotter's path to become a family medicine doctor started with a desire to be a veterinarian. Growing up in a family of ranchers in DeLeon, Texas, taking care of animals was what he wanted to do.



Cotter

Until he went on a missions trip to Brazil. "While I was there, I noticed how significant people's health care needs were, and they didn't have access to the kinds of care that we have in the United States. That is when I decided that I wanted to go into medicine. I wanted to get training that would make a difference."

Because of his rural background, Cotter recognized that rural communities in the U.S. often face similar health care access issues that he saw in Brazil. Even before he started medical school, he planned to return to a rural community as a physician.

"I grew up in a town of about 2,000 people. The doctors there did everything: football physicals, set arms broken during football practice, deliv-

ered babies. The country doctor took care of it," he explains. "I thought all doctors had a practice like that, but they don't. The nice thing about rural family medicine is that, by default, you wear a lot of hats. I like that."

Now completing his first year of family medicine residency at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in Amarillo, Cotter committed in May 2008 to make Spearman, Texas, home for his medical practice when he finishes residency in 2010.

"I have always planned to practice in West Texas. Other places are beautiful to visit, but West Texas is home," Cotter adds. "Spearman was a natural fit. The region is great for ranching, which I want to do someday. As a community, the people of Spearman have really taken care of their schools and their hospital; it is a great place to raise a family."

Cotter completed his medical training at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in Lubbock, where his focus on rural practice included participating in several offerings of the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health. He was a recipient of the Rural Health Education Scholarship for his four years of medical training and completed clinical rotations in

Childress, Denver City and Muleshoe. He was active in the Double T Health Service Corps student organization, serving as president and developing opportunities for Texas Tech students to do community service projects in rural communities across the region.

Cotter credits his rural experiences as a medical student, supported by the Institute and the West Texas Area Health Education Center Program, with helping him define the kind of community he wanted to live and work in. "The experience that I gained through the rural programs at Texas Tech really helped me to define what I want in my own practice."

After medical school in Lubbock, Cotter selected the family medicine residency program in Amarillo because it offered the best opportunity for him to gain a wide range of patient care experiences within family medicine—something that he felt was crucial for rural practice.

Cotter's choice for rural practice started when he was young, watching his own family doctor make a difference in their community. It was confirmed by his educational experiences, and will be made a reality in Spearman, Texas because of relationships developed through HealthMATCH.

2008 HealthMATCH dates for Amarillo and Lubbock are tentatively set for September 10th and November 18th, respectively.

Physician's path to rural practice cont'd from page 6

a relationship with new physicians. "Most new physicians are very interested in incentives that can help them start a practice like loan repayment options, practice start-up assistance, moving costs, bonuses, a level of guaranteed income. While these incentives are very important, it is the welcoming relationships that will keep the physician in the community—often much longer than the commitment required by the incentive."

J-1 Visa Waiver

The J-1 Visa Waiver program has two routes for communities to consider: one operated at the federal level through Health and Human Services and the other, the Conrad 30 program, operated in Texas by the Primary Care Office (PCO) at the Department of State Health Services (DSHS). Both

offer assistance to underserved communities with health care professional shortages. The federal waiver program allows some health care organizations in eligible underserved areas (Health Professional Shortage Area with a score of 7 or higher) to apply for a waiver to allow foreign-trained physicians to remain in the United States to practice at the end of their residency.

Without the waiver, the physician must return to his or her home country for two years after completing their residency training.

Clay Daniel, program specialist with the Primary Care Office, explains that the Conrad 30 program is not quite as stringent as the federal program. "With Conrad 30, our office can recommend either primary care or subspecialty physicians for the waiver, and the community does not have to be

a designated federally qualified health center or rural health clinic. It can be a private practice."

The Texas Primary Care Office will begin taking J-1 Visa Waiver applications on September 3, 2008 and will take applications until they have received 30. Applications are considered on a first come, first served basis.

Daniel adds, "In years past, the Conrad 30 program has been very competitive with the application slots completely filled the first day. Last year, it took six months to receive 30 applications, which should be encouraging for those who desire to pursue the waiver this year."

For more information about the Conrad 30 J-1 Visa Waiver program, visit the DSHS Primary Care Office website at www.dshs.state.tx.us/chpr/default.shtm.

Health careers camp highlights



Upcoming Events

July 11	Certified Nurse Aide Training	Abilene, TX Contact: Lynn Hogan, Big Country
July 16-19	Parish Nursing	Abilene, TX Contact: Lynn Hogan, Big Country
July 17-18	Crisis Intervention Training	Lubbock, TX Contact: Camy Brunson, Plains
July 17-18	17th Annual School Nurse Workshop	www.ttuhsu.edu/son/cne/courses.aspx
July 18	Understanding Infant Adoption	Pampa, TX Contact: Karen Russell, Panhandle
July 18	ABG, Fluid & Electrolytes	San Angelo, TX Contact: Patty Murphy, Permian
July 19-20	Pediatric Advanced Life Support	San Angelo, TX Contact: Patty Murphy, Permian
July 23-25	Trauma Nurse Core Curriculum	Lubbock, TX Contact: Camy Brunson, Plains
July 24, 25, 31, Aug 1	Basic Parish Nurse Prep & Health Advocate	Amarillo, TX Contact: Karen Russell, Panhandle
July 30-Aug 1	Emergency Nurse Pediatric Course	Lubbock, TX Contact: Camy Brunson, Plains
Aug 6-8, 20-22	Trauma Nurse Core Curriculum	Lubbock, TX Contact: Camy Brunson, Plains
Aug 21	The ABC's of Forensic Nursing	Amarillo, TX Contact: Karen Russell, Panhandle
Aug 21	Cultural Diversity/Communicating in the 21st Century	Lubbock, TX Contact: Camy Brunson, Plains
Aug 22	Family Violence/Child Abuse Investigation Techniques	Lubbock, TX Contact: Camy Brunson, Plains

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

Visit the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health website at www.ttuhsu.edu/ruralhealth for more.



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