

The Rural and Community Health Messenger

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F. Marie Hall Institute, Rural Communities Seek Ways to Thrive in Spite of Health Care Shortages

The U.S. Department of Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) defines a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) as an area having shortages of primary medical care, dental or mental health providers. These may be geographic by a county or service area or demographic, such as a low income population or institutions that are considered comprehensive health centers, federally qualified health centers, critical access hospitals or other public facilities. Medically Underserved Areas/Populations are areas or populations designated by HRSA as having too few primary care providers, high infant mortality, high poverty and/or high elderly population.

In spite of healthcare shortages, the communities in West Texas continue to seek out opportunities to improve health care and to find ways to thrive, adding critical resources to the state.

The F. Marie Hall Institute's West Texas Area Health Education Center has completed its initial round of community health assessment focus groups in the Permian Basin region and is expanding the scope of this assessment work to include an additional 20 counties across West Texas to be completed by the end of Summer 2011.

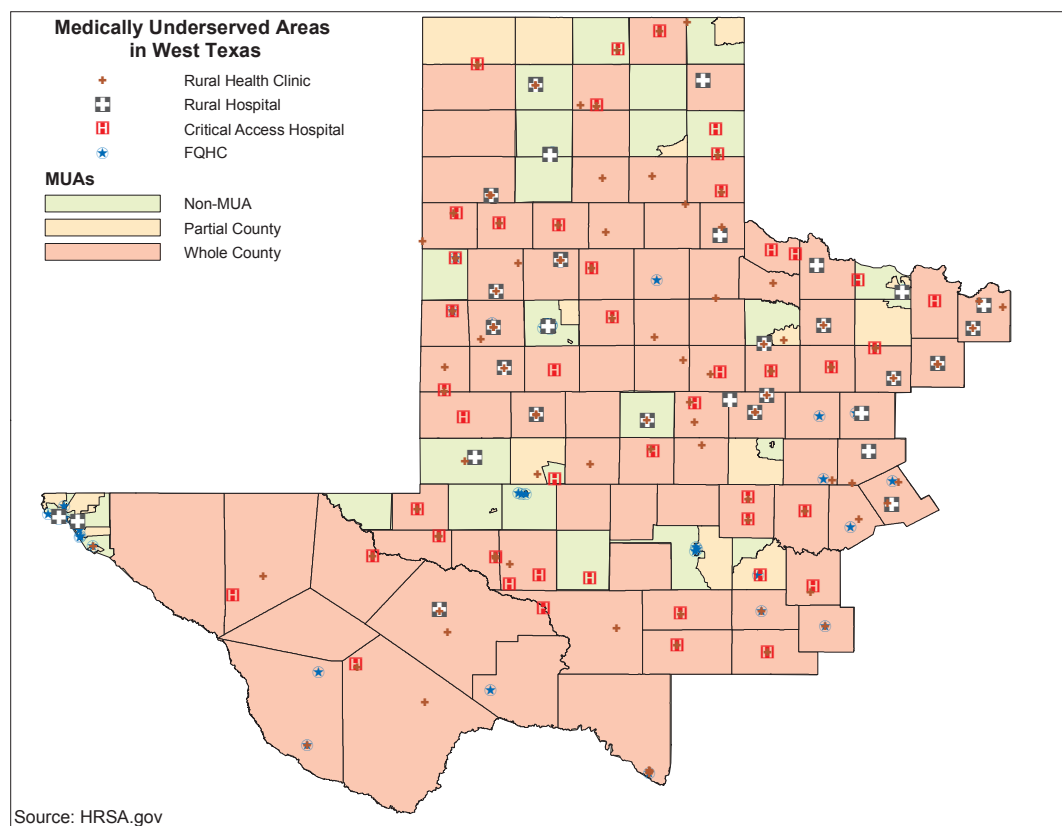
In each of the counties a focus group of community stakeholders are asked to identify health issues

of primary concern; a phone survey of residents in each county further evaluates healthcare access and priority health status needs in order to provide critical information to those in a position to make an impact on the health of the region. The West Texas AHEC has partnered with the Texas Tech University Department of Political Science and the Earl Survey Research Center to conduct the focus groups and phone surveys.

"The results of this phase of assessment will provide a strategic roadmap that local communities, as well as Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, can use to develop future initiatives to meet the most pressing needs," says Shannon Kirkland, director of the West Texas AHEC.

Data collected will help health providers in planning for local healthcare services.

For more information, contact Jenifer Hudman at Jenifer.hudman@ttuhsc.edu or 806.743.1338.



Source: HRSA.gov

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Roadmap to the Healthcare Crossroads of West Texas

There is a fair amount of travel that goes with my job as Vice President and Director of the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health. In these first two years, I have driven almost everywhere that I have traveled around the region. It is difficult to fly efficiently as most flights go through Dallas and back to locations like Amarillo, El Paso or Midland-Odessa. The other reason is that I love the back roads and byways that cross this vast and beautiful half of Texas. I want to see as many miles and meet as many of the people that live out here, as time permits. I have learned much from my adventures, including the best places to eat (I may write a book about that), where the real Texana curios can be found (another book), and much about healthcare needs.

You really can't travel across West Texas without coming to a crossroad. At some crossroads, I have turned back because I was lost and the only certain way forward was to retrace the route to find where I went wrong in the journey. There have been times during my travels that I didn't know which way to turn and picked a direction and went until I found someone who could point me to my destination. Very often, I just forge ahead; prepared to meet the unknown, but in hopes of finding my way safely, and sometimes finding a destination better than the one I had originally sought.

The future of health care in West Texas is like those journeys. We are at a crossroads. Maybe it's a corny metaphor, but we may need to retrace our route. There is no question that we are off course when a large portion of the population lacks access to health care because the infrastructure of clinics, hospitals and practitioners is too small for the demand. When that becomes complicated, due to people who are uninsured or underinsured, and reimbursement rates are too low, then we really get off course. If we are headed in the wrong direction and recognize that, then let's turn back—back to the communities that comprise this wonderful half of Texas. Let's ask them about the direction. Let's engage them in finding solutions for the problems.

Our goal in the F. Marie Hall Institute is to engage, equip and empower communities to find the best routes to the outcomes they desire. The journey we take at times will require that we boldly press forward using technology in innovative ways to shrink the distances we must travel. Make no mistake, we will continue the journey.

The F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health is working to help establish a roadmap for rural health care for the region. The crossroads are particularly important to the roadmap: crossroads connect. And that is what the Institute is about—connecting communities to each other and to new opportunities to improve health.

We are working with communities across the region to do assessments of community assets and needs to find creative and imaginative solutions. These are broad-based and coordinated through local health planning initiatives. Through the integration of resources in the West Texas Area Health Education Centers, we are continuing to focus on health workforce development initiatives, career pipeline programs and community-based training. Through the West Texas Health Information Technology Regional Extension Center and the Community Telemedicine Program, we are applying technology to enhance access and improve the quality of health care across the vastness of the region. Project FRONTIER is discovering through research the health threats and possible solutions for major health problems, such as Alzheimer's disease.

If we are successful in what we do, there will be a roadmap that includes directions for decision-making at several crossroads that will be pivotal to the future.

Come join us on this exciting journey as we chart the future of health care for West Texas.



Philips



EPA Grant Awarded to Examine Impact of Low-level Arsenic Exposure on Health

On March 1, 2011, researchers from the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC) were awarded approximately \$500,000 from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The project leader for the grant is Sid O'Bryant, Ph.D., director of rural health research at the Institute, along with other collaborators from TTUHSC and Texas Tech University.

The focus of the EPA grant is to study the effects of long-term low-level exposure to groundwater arsenic on the physical and cognitive health in rural adults and elders and determine if they are at an increased risk for negative health consequences due to the water they drink. The

study will be conducted through the rural health study program, Project FRONTIER (Facing Rural Obstacles to healthcare Now Through Intervention, Education and Research). O'Bryant and his colleagues will recruit 600 people into the study over a two-year period from the West Texas counties of Cochran, Bailey and Parmer.

O'Bryant says, "This is a huge step forward for our rural study. Project FRONTIER is one of the largest and most comprehensive studies of rural health in U.S. history. This grant from the EPA will enable us to determine if rural adults and elders are at increased risk for negative health consequences due to the water they drink. No one in the U.S. has ever explicitly studied

how drinking water, which contains arsenic at levels below what the EPA has deemed acceptable, might be harmful in the long term. If we demonstrate that this is harmful, we can then push for refinement of policy regarding acceptable drinking water standards."

Project FRONTIER is the core program for rural health research at the F. Marie Hall Institute. Project FRONTIER includes topics of study in aging and dementia, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, obesity, smoking and alcohol, including how each of these factors have a differential impact based on gender and ethnicity.

For more information, visit <http://www.ttuhsu.edu/ruralhealth/researchgroup>.

Rural Cancer Research Shows Correlation Between Advanced Cancer and Income Status

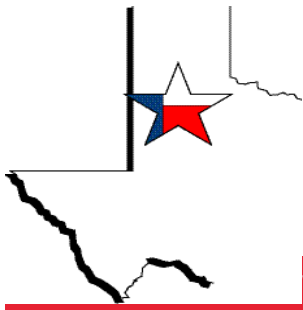
Members of the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health and Texas Tech University recently published an article in the *International Journal of Health Geographics*. The research article titled "Correlation of the ratio of metastatic to non-metastatic cancer cases with the degree of socioeconomic deprivation among Texas counties," shows significant correlation between the low socioeconomic status of people in rural communities and the late detection of cancer for all types of

cancer.

Recent research shows that being economically disadvantaged is a significant cause of discovering cancer after it is well advanced or when it has *metastasized* (to spread to other parts of the body by way of the blood vessels or membrane surfaces) and is less easily treatable. Identifying cancer in its early stages by screening and improving access to the medical system leads to substantially higher success rates in treatment and fewer cancer deaths. Rural communities

are particularly challenged due to their relatively low incomes and distance to medical facilities.

This research was based out of the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health and completed by the research team of Billy Philips, Jr, PhD, Gordon Gong, MD, Kristopher Hargrave, Eric Belasco, PhD and Conrad Lyford, PhD. The full article can be found at: <http://www.ij-healthgeographics.com/content/10/1/12/abstract>.



AHEC Update

WEST TEXAS AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTER PROGRAM

AHEC Hosts Hands-on Events to Prepare Students for Health Careers

The West Texas Area Health Education Center (AHEC) is hosting a variety of health career camps across the region during the summer. These camps are open to area high school students and provide exposure to the countless opportunities in healthcare careers. While the camps vary by region, they all provide hands-on learning activities that students might not otherwise have, like job shadowing and tons of healthcare training programs.

During the camps, students have opportunities to use and experience the latest technology and clinical simulation tools they will be using during their training and as health professionals.

Below are the camp dates and locations for the West Texas region.



Above: Teen Leadership Conference, July 19-22, 2011, Lubbock, Texas.

AHEC of the Plains		
Medical Academy	Plainview, TX	June 5-9
Big Country AHEC		
Health Matters Summer Camp	Abilene, TX	June 7-10
	Stephenville, TX	June 20-23
Borderland AHEC		
Dreams Camp	El Paso, TX	June 6-July 1
Health Matters Summer Camp	El Paso, TX	June 20-24 July 11-15
MASH Camp	Alpine TX	June 27-30
Panhandle AHEC		
Advanced MASH Camp (full)	Canyon, TX	June 6-9, 12-16, 20-23
Permian Basin AHEC		
Jump Start Medical Careers	Stanton, TX	June 13-16
	Odessa, TX	June 27-30
	San Angelo, TX	July 11-14

Also this summer, the West Texas AHEC will be hosting its 2nd annual Teen Leadership Conference on the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center campus in Lubbock, July 19-22, 2011. The theme for this year's conference will be structured around "The Amazing Quest of Leadership: Starts Here." It will be packed with team building activities, communication skills development and decision-making trials, as well as career and college exploration opportunities.

If you know of a student who might be interested in attending one of these camps, please visit www.westtexasahec.org for registration information and other details. There is a nominal registration fee and scholarships are available.

Rural Physician Finds Telemedicine, AHEC to be Key to Enhancing Care

Steve Ahmed, M.D., a pediatrician in Big Spring, Texas, began his medical career in New York City, where he trained at New York-Presbyterian, Columbia University Medical Center. He then moved to Texas in 1996 and opened his own practice seven years ago.



Ahmed

Dr. Ahmed is one of only a handful of pediatricians in rural West Texas. When asked what made him decide to practice in a rural community versus a bigger city, he said, “Honestly, at first I needed to pay off some student loans. But, in time, I stayed because I wanted to make a difference in the rural community. The people in my community are dependent on me and I help to fill a gap that’s desperately needed out here.”

In addition to being a pediatrician in Big Spring, he also participates as a community-based preceptor through West Texas AHEC. Preceptors offer an opportunity for medical students to work with rural physicians in their clinics to better understand the principles of community medicine and to get a taste of rural medicine.

Ahmed has hosted students for clinical rotations for 16 years. “I

became a preceptor because it exposes the students to the rural communities. Not just the patients, but their lives and their work; the students see all aspects of the patients they work with in the rural community. Also, by having the students in my office, it opens up avenues for them to come back to the rural areas and practice medicine when they graduate.”

In December 2009, Dr. Ahmed began utilizing telemedicine through the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health at TTUHSC. Telemedicine provides Ahmed and his patients with access to specialty physicians at the Health Sciences Center, which helps to keep patients in their home community.

Debbie Voyles, director of Telemedicine at TTUHSC explains, “The purpose of telemedicine is to be a tool that helps the local healthcare provider deliver the best health care closest to home.”

Telemedicine also helps with training medical students during their rural rotations.

“Telemedicine is not as advanced yet as we want it to be,” says Ahmed, “but it is a benefit to my patients. It also helps the students to understand the rural setting concept better and that while they are working with a patient who has a specialty need, there is help available to support treatment locally and minimize the need for the

patient to travel for care.”

Almost 400 community healthcare professionals across the region participate as community-based preceptors through the West Texas Area Health Education Center (AHEC) program. The five regional AHEC centers serve as the central infrastructure connecting healthcare training programs from across the state with community-based clinical rotations in the region.

“These community-based rotations provide pivotal experiences for students, giving them a solid understanding of what practicing in a rural community is all about,” says Patti Murphy, community-based education coordinator at the Permian Basin AHEC, which serves Big Spring.

In 2010, the West Texas AHEC facilitated more than 500 community-based clinical rotations for more than 93,000 hours of training.

Based on the experiences that Dr. Ahmed has had with West Texas AHEC and Telemedicine, he believes that both programs are “very vital and essential.” He adds, “The preceptor program brings a new workforce into the medical field and many students do come back to work in the rural communities when they graduate. It’s also a good way to give back to the community. It’s all about being able to provide the best care for my community.”

Ogallala Commons: Community Health Spotlights at South Plains Conference

Living a healthy life doesn’t just depend on individual choices, but also on the health of the community where people live. On February 16, Ogallala Commons and its partners hosted its 22nd Annual Southern Plains conference, where more than 100 people gathered to learn more about “What Makes Communities Healthy?”

The conference was held at the Community Hall and Home Mercantile in Nazareth, Texas.

“Community health is multifaceted: it involves economic, social,

mental, physical, environmental, emotional, and spiritual wellness,” notes Darryl Birkenfeld, director of Ogallala Commons. “Community health is exactly where involved citizens can have a great impact.”

The conference was the culmination of a year-long Rural and Community Health internship through Ogallala Commons completed by Tabitha King, a Texas Tech University student who has plans to attend medical school.

Sponsors for the 22nd Annual

Southern Plains Conference were Ogallala Commons, the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, Castro County Health-Care, Swisher Memorial Hospital and Texas Farmers Union.

For more information about Ogallala Commons, contact Darryl Birkenfeld, at 806.945.2255 (darrylb@amaonline.com) or visit www.ogallalacommons.org/southernplainsconference.html.

First-Ever HealthMATCH Event in El Paso Brings Together Communities and Students

On March 31, 2011 the Borderland Area Health Education Center (AHEC) held a HealthMATCH event in the Medical Education Building lobby, in conjunction with the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center – El Paso’s Paul L. Foster School of Medicine.

The HealthMATCH event provides West Texas communities and Texas Tech resident physicians, medical and nursing students a forum to interact and discuss practice opportunities.

“Communities needing providers and residents and student clinicians looking for a practice location have made connections at this event, which can be pursued further to match the community and the individual with a practice opportunity that meets both parties’ needs,” states Marci Brooks, Borderland Area Health Education Center (AHEC) director.

Twenty-five communities participated, sharing information about practice opportunities. In addition, the Department of State Health Services Primary Care Office, the Texas Department of Rural Affairs, and the Texas Association of Community Health Centers attended.

Presentations on the J-1 Visa Waiver program, loan repayment program for residents, medical students, and nurses, and scholarship information for medical and nursing students were also provided.

More than 200 future health professionals attended the event including TTUHSC medical students, nursing students from TTUHSC and El Paso Community College, and TTUHSC medical residents (representing specialties of internal medicine, OB/GYN, pediatrics, family medicine, emergency medicine, psychiatry, radiology, surgery).

“Some communities have an immediate opening, and others are anticipating a need in the next one to three years. Community representatives from hospitals, clinics, groups and other areas were available to discuss more about their practice opportunities



Top: Community representative discussing job opportunities with attendees at El Paso HealthMATCH event.

Bottom left: Manuel de la Rosa, M.D., dean of the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine at TTUHSC El Paso delivers the keynote address to a packed room of West Texas community representatives.

Bottom Right: Nursing students receiving community information.

in a one-on-one setting,” Brooks says.

www.westtexasahec.org.

West Texas AHEC and its regional AHEC partners regularly host HealthMATCH and other significant events to provide opportunities for residents, students and communities to interact.

The next HealthMATCH event is scheduled for June 27th in Lubbock, Texas. For more information, contact Danielle Askins at 806.291.0101 or visit

H.O.T. Jobs Parent Guide Provided to Area High School Freshmen

In Spring 2011, the West Texas Area Health Education Center (AHEC) distributed copies of the *Texas H.O.T. Jobs Parent Guide*, in both English and Spanish, to more than 42,000 high school freshmen in the West Texas region. The *Parent Guide* is a 32-page booklet detailing the available careers in the healthcare field.

The book offers information geared for parents about how they can help their children prepare for health career education after high school.

Not all careers in health are hands-on patient care. There is a wide variety of options from business to information technology to direct patient care, ranging from one to four years of training.

"It is important to foster the relationships with students as they enter high school, to help them understand what options are available to them—and what they need to do in high school to make the most of those options," says Chris Felton, community student coordinator for the West Texas AHEC.

"Parents and families play a key role in helping students set and reach their career goals."

Texas is ranked 37th in the country

for high school freshmen that do not graduate. The Texas state demographer projects, if current trends continue, that 1-in-3 students who are currently in high school will not graduate.

It is critical to the future of West Texas students that parents, teachers, counselors and school administrators' work together to pursue an adequate level of education in order to provide a skilled workforce for the state.

"West Texas AHEC and its sister AHEC programs serving East and South Texas are the central clearinghouse to support educators with critical information resources like the *Texas H.O.T. Jobs*. The AHECs also work directly with students to prepare them for entry into health careers, which is one of the critical high-demand industries for Texas," adds Shannon Kirkland, director of the West Texas AHEC program.

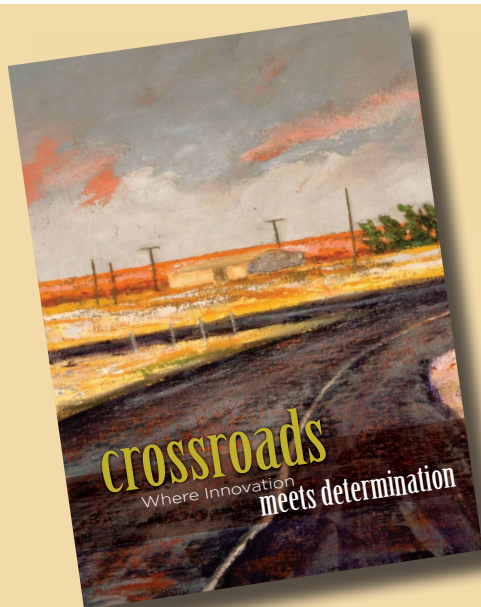
The *Parent Guide* is a companion resource to the 144-page *H.O.T. Jobs Career Guidebook*, available to high schools and colleges across Texas. The *H.O.T. Jobs* information can also be



found online at www.texashotjobs.org, as an app for your iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad and on Facebook and Twitter.

The *Parent Guide* is available at your local Area Health Education Center (AHEC). The printing is a shared work of the West Texas, East Texas and South Texas AHEC groups.

The 5th edition of the *H.O.T. Jobs* resources is under development and will be available in Fall 2011.



Meeting at the Crossroads: A Conference for Rural and Community Health

June 27-28, 2011
Lubbock, Texas

- Day 1** - Opening: Billy U. Philips, Jr. Ph.D., M.P.H.
V.P., F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health
- Effectively Using EHRs to Improve Patient Care
 - HealthMATCH Rural Recruiting Event
- Day 2** - Keynote: Tedd Mitchell, M.D. TTUHSC President
Interactive Workshops
- Future Workforce Needs
 - Best Care Closest to Home
 - Mobilized and Engaged Communities

To participate, visit www.WestTexasAHEC.org or contact Kara Hyden at 806.743.1338 or Kara.Hyden@ttuhsc.edu.

Be Sun SmartSM



Did you know that your skin is the largest organ in your body?

May is Skin Cancer Detection

and Prevention Month. The American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) also designates the first Monday in May as Melanoma Monday[®]. The purpose of Melanoma Monday[®] is to raise awareness about melanoma, which is a potentially fatal skin cancer and to encourage early detection. Both skin cancer and melanoma are treatable when caught early.

According to the American Cancer Society's 2008 Cancer Facts and Figures, sun exposure is the most preventable risk factor for all skin cancers, including melanoma. You are the first line of defense when it comes to protecting your skin from the sun and for doing a preliminary skin test. The best preventive measure is to examine your body regularly for spots of discoloration or moles. Listed below are the steps for doing a self skin test:

1. Examine your body front and back in the mirror and then look at your right and left sides with your arms raised.
2. Bend your elbows and look carefully at your forearms, under your arms and palms of your hands.
3. Look at the backs of your legs and feet, the spaces between your toes and the soles of your feet.
4. Examine the back of your neck and scalp with a hand mirror; part your hair if needed, for a closer look.
5. Finally, check your back and your buttocks with a hand mirror.

To find free skin cancer screenings in your area, visit www.aad.org. Remember that skin cancer is preventable and YOU are the first step in preventing it. Be Sun SmartSM!



Upcoming Events

May 10	Ethics After Hours	Amarillo, TX Contact: Karen Russell, Panhandle
May 12	Hospice Teleconference	Amarillo, TX Contact: Karen Russell, Panhandle
May 18-19	ENPC: Emergency Nurse Pediatric Course	Amarillo, TX Contact: Karen Russell, Panhandle
May 20	Licensed Professional Counselors and Social Workers CE	Plainview, TX Contact: Cheri Read, Plains
May 25-27	Trauma Nursing Core Course	Lubbock, TX Contact: Cheri Read, Plains
May 27	Disorders of Consciousness	Midland, TX Contact: Patty Murphy, Permian Basin
May 27	Cultural Competency 201, CHW	El Paso, TX Contact: Tony Ramos, Borderland
June 4	Medication Management in the Older Adult	Midland, TX Contact: Patty Murphy, Permian Basin
June 9	STABLE Class	Brownwood, TX Contact: Michael Smith, Big Country
June 14	PALS Class	Brownwood, TX Contact: Michael Smith, Big Country
June 22	IV Therapy Course	Midland, TX Contact: Patty Murphy, Permian Basin
June 24	Needs Assessment for Organizations, CHW	El Paso, TX Contact: Tony Ramos, Borderland
June 27-28	Meeting at the Crossroads: A conference for Rural and Community Health	Lubbock, TX www.westtexasahec.org
July 11-12	ACLS Class	Brownwood, TX Contact: Michael Smith, Big Country
Aug 26	HIV/AIDS in the Latino Population, CHW	El Paso, TX Contact: Tonya Ramos, Borderland

AHEC of the Plains 806.291.0101
Borderland AHEC 915.751.1699
Permian Basin AHEC 432.685.8306

Big Country AHEC 325.672.0495
Panhandle AHEC 806.651.3480