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A New Grant Program from HHS's Office of Rural Health Policy is Attracting Students to Rural Health

To address the severe health care workforce shortage in rural areas, the Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Rural Health Policy (ORHP) awarded 20 grants in 2010 as part of a three-year pilot program to expose medical students to rural health clinical practice. In addition to the clinical experience, the grantees are required to engage the students in rural community activities so that they can better understand what it is like to live in rural areas and be an essential part of a small community. At the end of the program, ORHP will have a lot of data to share with their rural health partners on how to best recruit and retain health care providers in rural areas.

Read the full story in the National Rural Health Association (NRHA) online magazine, Rural Roads at: http://ruralroadsonline.com/Grants_help_new_programs_attract_students_to_rural. ◆

Did You Know?

- The health care provider shortage in the U.S. is widely documented and expected to last through 2050. Almost half of the health care workforce will be 45 years or older by 2008.
- There are serious uneven distribution problems in the health care provider workforce. One in five U.S. residents is medically underserved.
- While 20% of the U.S. population lives in rural areas, only 9% of all physicians and 12% of all pharmacists practice in rural communities.
- Only 10% of all psychologists/psychiatrists and 20% of masters-level social workers work in rural areas.
- There is growing consensus that telehealth can make important contributions in solving the problem of uneven distribution and shortage of health care providers in rural areas.
- Health workforce recruitment and retention in rural areas and telehealth and health information coordination are priorities in President Obama's Rural Health Initiative.
- Rural health care provider recruitment and training, and increasing access through telehealth are strategic priorities for the VHA Office of Rural Health. ◆



The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Awards \$6 Million for Rural Telehealth

Eligible healthcare organizations and institutions of research and higher education in rural areas of six states served by the Delta Regional Authority will get \$6 million in grants to help finance 10 new telehealth projects in the region. This is an effort to help improve access to care and to address unmet health care needs for rural residents who live in the south central portion of the country. The telehealth projects range from an electronic Intensive Care Unit system in Mississippi to an Acute Stroke System for Emergent Regional Telemedicine in Central Louisiana. In other national telehealth news, the Department of Veterans Affairs recently selected two private companies, American Well and SweetSpot Diabetes Care, from a competition known as VAI2, to launch two new projects utilizing telehealth technology to deliver care to Veterans in rural areas. SweetSpot Diabetes Care will remotely monitor blood glucose levels in Veterans with diabetes from their home and send the results directly to the VA's electronic medical record system. VA health care providers monitor the results and are alerted when glucose levels are poorly controlled. American Well will deploy its online care system for Veterans, especially those in rural areas, that will allow them and their care provider to have online consultations via video, text, and phone messaging. ◆

