Rural Health Education Partnerships

WVRHEP Mission Statement

"...we envision a time when all residents of our more underserved, rural communities have local access to high quality primary health care provided by well trained, high quality health care professionals."

West Virginia is entering its eighth year of educating health sciences students in rural communities through the West Virginia Rural Health Education Partnerships (WVRHEP). Students are learning health care skills from rural practitioners and experiencing life as a rural health care provider. By introducing students to the rewards and challenges of rural practice, the WVRHEP increases the possibility that they will stay in West Virginia and practice where they are needed.

The program also provides an infrastructure for providing health services and promoting healthy lifestyles in rural communities. This year, more than 156,000 West Virginians benefited directly from these services – a 56% increase over the previous year.

The WVRHEP infrastructure covers the most underserved areas of 47 counties and includes the following components:

- Thirteen training consortia, with local boards of directors, linking more than 250 training sites, including hospitals, health centers, social service agencies, doctors' and dentists' offices, and pharmacies in rural communities;
- Revised curricula with course content on rural practice, rural communities and populations, and interdisciplinary team-building skills, as well as expanded rural clinical rotations;
- Nearly 500 rural health care professionals serving as field faculty for students;
- Learning resource centers (LRCs) with computer stations and educational materials at 18 locations, ten of which are connected to statewide educational programs through MDTV (interactive telemedicine); and
- Scholarships and stipends that provide incentives for primary care training and rural practice. This year, 24 scholarship recipients, including 15 medical students, made a commitment to practice in rural West Virginia for at least two to four years after completing their training.

The University System Board of Trustees and the Vice Chancellor for Health Sciences have mandated that all health sciences students complete three-month rotations in rural communities. Dental students, because of unique curricular requirements, complete two-month rotations. This year, students from nine disciplines completed almost 1,600 rotations in WVRHEP sites and in other rural settings -- and many students completed more than one rotation. The nine disciplines include: clinical psychology, dentistry, dental hygiene, medical technology, medicine, nursing, pharmacy, physician assistant, and physical therapy.

Progress Made in 1998-1999

- *More than 120 of the Partners engaged in a retreat to review the program's progress and plan for future directions*.
- *WVRHEP continues to receive national recognition at professional conferences.*
- *Almost 1,600 student rotations, including 1,200 at WVRHEP sites, were completed in rural settings.*
- *24 scholarships were awarded to health sciences students who will practice in rural communities.*

- *TRACKER, a computerized student tracking system that is accessible through the Internet, was featured at the Governor's Technology Conference.*
- *Nearly 500 field faculty now participate in WVRHEP.*
- *Direct services benefitted about 13,000 West Virginians each month – more than 156,000 for the entire year.*
- *Dental and dental hygiene students performed more than 10,000 clinical procedures for about 4,700 patients.*

Community-Service Learning

Through continuing board development activities at the local consortium level, WVRHEP boards have strengthened their roles in community-based training and recruitment and retention, including increased board member contact with students, training in recruitment and retention for site coordinators, and participation in the Recruitable Communities Project for some local consortia board members.

WVRHEP continues to further West Virginia's national visibility as a state on the cutting edge of community-based health professions training. The program was highlighted in *Leadership Stories*, a publication of the University of Chicago, which featured an interview with the Vice Chancellor for Heath Sciences. The Executive Director presented on the program's accomplishments at the national AHEC (Area Health Education Centers) conference in Louisville, Kentucky. A site coordinator, and several field faculty and community members participated in the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health conference in Seattle, Washington, and gave a presentation on WVRHEP and the Health Sciences Technology Academy. Program participants from the schools and training sites have been asked to make presentations on the WVRHEP model. This recognition demonstrates the value of the comprehensive approach taken by the State and the Legislature to advance health professions education.

WVRHEP offers statewide Faculty Development Days for field and campus faculty in concepts unique to the program such as interdisciplinary training and service-learning through community-based research and service. Over 100 partners attended the faculty development days held this year at Alderson-Broaddus College, which focused on "Hands-on Training for Preceptors in Clinical Education." Eight sessions were offered to field faculty in the use of information technology to enhance both their clinical practice and teaching skills. In addition, orientation was held for new field faculty members.

Efforts are being made to improve the role of the on-site clinical directors through meetings with the Faculty Development Committee and the School Committee and by gathering information for site coordinators and field faculty on the effectiveness of this role at the local level. In addition, the Faculty Development Committee has worked with all the schools to include sessions for field faculty in existing continuing education events sponsored by the schools.

In the 1998-99 academic year, 1,232 student rotations, involving over 5,800 weeks of training, were completed at WVRHEP training sites. In addition, 364 student rotations, involving almost 1,500 weeks of training, were completed at other rural sites in the state.

Feedback on WVRHEP Experience

In surveys conducted this year, students gave high marks to the value of their rural training experiences:

- *"The key to community practice is establishing a relationship with the patients, and it is such an exciting feeling when you actually help them with their needs!"*
  Pharmacy Student
- *"I have been given the opportunity to make clinical decisions, treatments, and other therapies, and [the doctor] gives excellent feedback plus teaching during this process. We can spend as much time as needed with the patients."*
  Medical Student

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- *"Everyone has the same focus -- quality rural health care. It is very collaborative and interactive. The people working at this clinic are very knowledgeable."*
  Nurse Practitioner Student

- *"Working in a rural area you see more patient-doctor interaction. You get to work in a community and have a positive impact there. People respect and talk to you more in the rural towns."*
  Physician Assistant Student

Recruitment and Retention

The Recruitment and Retention Committee of the WVRHEP Advisory Panel provides overall coordination of state incentive programs as a complementary strategy to the rural rotations. The committee has served as the focal point for collaboration involving the Bureau for Public Health, the health professions schools, local consortia, and the Center for Rural Health Development. These efforts included facilitation of a work group to plan recruitment and retention strategies for funding under the West Virginia Rural Health Access Program. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation are jointly funding the implementation of this program, which includes initiatives to coordinate placement activities, evaluate recruitment incentives, provide technical assistance to communities on recruitment and retention, and coordinate practice support for rural physicians.

Under the Rural Health Access Program, the state will receive funding to link placement activities of the medical schools and the Bureau for Public Health through a single, Internet-accessible database of practice opportunities. This project will enhance recruitment and retention of West Virginia graduates and physicians in residency training. The website will be linked to a national database for rural recruitment, so that practitioners in other states can learn about opportunities in rural West Virginia. The school partners include the WVU Placement Office, which was established in 1998 to assist alumni and residents in finding practice opportunities in rural West Virginia, and staff at WVSOM and the Marshall School of Medicine, who will coordinate placement of their alumni and residents.

The Recruitable Communities Project, under the leadership of the WVU Department of Family Medicine, will be continued under the Rural Health Access Program. The project is working with six rural communities (Grantsville, Hinton, West Union, Cabin Creek, Spencer, and Richwood) to enhance the community's role in recruitment and strengthen ties with residency programs. This is a collaborative project involving the WVU Extension Service, the Bureau for Public Health, the Center for Rural Health Development, the University System, and the medical schools. The project will produce a Recruitment and Retention Handbook, based on lessons learned, for all rural communities.

In 1998-99, the Vice Chancellor for Health Sciences awarded $10,000 scholarships to 22 students – including 13 medical students, three nurse practitioner students, and six physician assistant students. These participants in the Health Sciences Scholarship Program have made a commitment to practice at least two years in a rural underserved area of West Virginia after completing their training. Twenty-six practitioners from prior years are now serving their obligations.

Federal funding for the Community Scholarship Program, which also involves state and local funds, ends this year. Since 1991 this program has sponsored 23 health professions students, including two medical students who received scholarships this year. Students have made a commitment to return to their hometowns in rural West Virginia and practice for a minimum of two to four years. WVRHEP coordinates this program and will continue to oversee the return of these students to their communities. The National Health Service Corps SEARCH Program, administered jointly by WVRHEP and the Bureau for Public Health, is designed to help communities recruit students and residents by providing stipends for those who want to extend their training in rural underserved areas. This year, over $70,000 in stipends was awarded to 29 students in medicine, nurse practitioner and midwifery programs, clinical psychology, and physician assistant programs.

Technology and Telecommunications

The WVRHEP Advisory Panel is continually addressing the role of the Learning Resource Center (LRC) with the assistance of the LRC Committee**.** Each of the 18 LRCs has a Pentium computer system, Windows 95/98, Internet connectivity, and E-mail. These standards ensure that students and field faculty have the capacity to participate fully in the programs that WVRHEP has developed. These programs include, but are not limited to, Digital Document Delivery; Real Audio/Real Video lectures and coursework over the Internet; continuing medical education (CME) credits over the Internet; and student scheduling, database management, and tracking through the fully operational TRACKER system.

The TRACKER system allows schedulers at each school to confirm the availability of field faculty and housing at the training sites, and permits students to view information on training opportunities while selecting their rotations. TRACKER also allows the site coordinators and program evaluators to report student and consortium activities, such as interdisciplinary training sessions, community service/outreach, and research. The WVRHEP administrators can generate snapshot reports of these activities across all consortia.

TRACKER can be reached from all of the partnering schools' websites or from the newly acquired URL, http://www.wvrhep.org. All users must have a password to get into the system to ensure the system's integrity. The system is currently running for all the disciplines across all three schools, including medicine, nursing, dentistry, pharmacy and allied health disciplines.

Creating an Educational Pipeline

The Health Sciences and Technology Academy (HSTA) reaches out to 8th-12th grade students in 22 counties and helps them prepare for higher education and health care careers. The goal is to nurture the ambitions of talented minority and disadvantaged students who might not ordinarily achieve their career goals. HSTA is a partnership among the various schools at West Virginia University, WVRHEP, and many communities. The program brings students and their teachers to the campus each summer for clinic, laboratory, and classroom training, and then provides support for community-based science projects during the school year, mentored by teachers, health professions students, and community volunteers. The program began in 1994 with private and foundation funding; this year it received a state appropriation. Over 500 students and 53 teachers are participating in HSTA.

This year, 61 seniors completed the HSTA program and did extremely well compared to their peers. HSTA seniors had a college-going rate of 95.1% and a dropout rate of only 1.6%. Grade point averages were all well above 3.0, and the average ACT score of 22.0 was above both the West Virginia (20.1) and national (21.0) averages. All the in-state college students received tuition and fee waivers if needed.

Community Services

WVRHEP students, faculty, and staff continue to demonstrate their commitment to providing health services to the people of West Virginia. In the 1998-99 academic year, direct health services benefited about 13,000 people each month – more than 156,000 for the entire year – and touched the lives of many others through community projects.

WVRHEP dental sites, for example, provided approximately $1,053,600 in uncompensated clinical dental services to rural West Virginians this year. Dental and dental hygiene students and one dentist, who was participating in a rural fellowship demonstration program at these sites, performed more than 10,000 clinical procedures for about 4,720 patients. Additionally, students and faculty participated in about 400 community outreach activities reaching approximately 10,700 West Virginians.

Student community service activities, such as health screenings and health fairs, are targeted throughout the state to all age groups of West Virginians. In addition, students work with communities to develop a variety of imaginative, worthwhile projects. For example, a physician assistant student, who is also a paramedic and CPR instructor, trained police officers in the use of automated external defibrillators (AEDs). AEDs were placed in police cruisers so officers could respond via 911 to any sudden cardiac arrest that would occur in their jurisdictions. The project was promoted widely by the local media. The student's research article was later published in a national magazine, *PA Today*.

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The WVRHEP continues to provide a wide variety of preventative health care and community service programs, such as:

Health Fairs
Screenings (blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose, etc.)
Immunizations
Outreach for Children's Health Insurance
4-H Handicap Games
Kinetic Therapy for Seniors
Bingo for Health
Sports Physicals
Dental Health Education
Diet and Exercise Presentations
Flu Shots
Smoking Cessation
Smokeless Tobacco Presentations
Date Rape and Violence Prevention
Depression Screening
Bright Smiles, Bright Futures Dental Program
Alcohol Abuse and Addictive Behaviors Program
Nutrition Education
Poison Prevention
School Bus Safety
Disaster Planning
Steroid Presentations
Black Lung Clinics
Diabetes Education & Support Groups
Energy Express

Current Issues

The WVRHEP Partners have reached a new stage of development in which they are challenging themselves and each other to higher levels of integration and mission accomplishment. At the June 1999 Retreat, many issues and strategies were identified to further partnership goals. As a result, the State Advisory Panel passed a resolution to form a year-long vision work group to take these findings and prepare recommendations for the Panel on the program's future strategies. Although the program still faces challenges, great strides have been made this year by focusing on issues of quality in the educational program, integration of the curricular components, and consistency across the training sites. One of our curricular challenges continues to be integration of meaningful service-learning activities for students on rotation. Efforts will be made in this upcoming year to provide training for site coordinators and field and campus faculty in the concepts of service-learning by the mentor network of the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health organization.

Current program issues include:

- Continuing to build upon a collaborative governance model;
- Growth of the local consortia boards in addressing local recruitment and retention needs and training community leaders in recruitment and retention strategies;
- Further development of the on-site clinical director role;
- Review of the budget process by conducting consortia performance audits through a request-for-proposals process; and
- Faculty development efforts at the local level to increase the number of qualified field faculty in all areas.