

Heartland Rural Health Network, Inc.

Serving Highlands, Hardee, DeSoto, Charlotte, & Polk Counties

Network News

There are two ways of spreading light:

To be the candle or the mirror that reflects it ~Edith Wharton

Network Receives \$35,000 Blue Foundation Grant

The Heartland Rural Health Network, Inc. was recently awarded a generous grant in the amount of \$35,000 by the Blue Foundation for a Healthy Florida, Inc., the philanthropic affiliate of Blue Cross, Blue Shield of Florida. This grant provides health and social outreach services to the rural homeless and uninsured of Highlands, Hardee, and DeSoto Counties. The Heart-



From left: Vincent Hill, Highlands County Housing Office; Gail Prichard, Central Florida Health Care; Mary Foy, Highlands County Human Services; Penny Phillippi, Highlands County Housing Office; Susan Wildes, Blue Foundation For A Healthy Florida; Penny Kurtz, DeSoto County Health Department; Susan Leverage-Grossman, DeSoto Health Resources; Kelly Johnson and Rudy Reinhardt of Heartland Rural Health Network accept the \$35,000 grant check from the Blue Foundation for a Healthy Florida in August, 2006.

land Rural Health Services Outreach Program (HRHS), operated by the Network, aims to increase access to quality health care services through the collaboration of local health care providers and social service agencies. This grant provides funding to hire a part-time Case Manager and funding for medical vouchers for eligible uninsured individuals who are unable to pay for their medical appointments with participating Outreach Program providers. This grant

Heartland Rural Health Network the opportunity to develop this program into a more visible and beneficial resource to our rural communities," said J. Rudy Reinhardt, Executive Director of HRHN. "With these funded additions to the program, we will be able to significantly increase the number of services and options we can provide to an even greater number of clients." A check in the amount of \$35,000 was presented by Susan Wildes, Assistant Director of the

Blue Foundation for a Healthy Florida to HRHN on Friday, August 24, 2006 at the Children's Advocacy Center in Sebring. On hand during the presentation were several of the Outreach Program's participating providers and service agency representatives who often refer clients to the Outreach Program. "The Blue Foundation is proud of this partnership with The Heartland Rural Health Network," said Susan Towler, Executive Director of the Blue Foun-

dation for a Healthy Florida. "With increased funding to health care and social services in rural Highlands, Hardee, and DeSoto Counties, we are working together to promote increased access and health care options to the uninsured and homeless." The Blue Foundation for a Healthy Florida annually awards up to \$1 million in grants during two grant cycles. To refer a client or for more information on services available please call 863-452-6530.

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DeSoto Memorial Hospital Receives \$20 Million USDA Loan

DeSoto Memorial Hospital's \$20 million construction and remodeling project broke ground May 5, 2006. The project, which is being funded by the largest direct loan ever awarded by the United States Department of Agriculture, includes the expansion and renovation of all of the hospital's patient areas as well as the façade. Once construction is completed in the fall of 2007, the facility will expand from its current 90,000 sq. ft to approximately 146,000 sq. ft. Because patients are the hospital's highest priority, the 56,000 sq. ft. expansion will take place in patient areas, including the emergency department, surgery suite, medical-surgical unit, lobby, and out-patient/registration areas. The emergency department will expand to almost double its current size; to 18 treatment rooms. All 18 rooms will be separated by walls for privacy. The surgical suite will also be expanded and will have a separate area for outpatients to be prepared and to



DeSoto Memorial Hospital's renovations and expansion are being provided by a \$20 million dollar USDA Rural Development loan.

Once construction is completed in the fall of 2007, DMH will expand from its current 90,000 sq. ft to approximately 146,000 sq. ft.

recover from surgery.

Another important feature of the new surgical suite will be a large operating room specifically for orthopedic surgery. A separate waiting area will be built to accommodate the family and friends of those in surgery. The medical-surgical unit will consist of private rooms that will be large enough to comfortably accommodate family members. Each room will have its own bathroom for convenience. Because of the need for the hospital to grow with the community it serves, the medical-surgical unit will have the capability

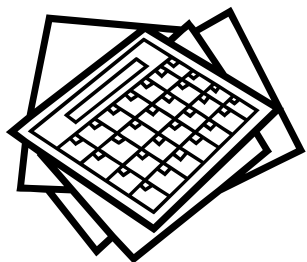
to expand upward so that another floor can be added in the future. A new lobby and multiple waiting areas will provide ample seating for admitting, outpatient testing, outpatient surgery and the emergency department. There will also be a coffee bar to serve the waiting areas.

The total cost of the project is \$20 million, which includes \$15 million for construction, \$2.6 million for equipment and \$2.4 million for the architect and other fees.

Article contributed by Annie Curnow, DMH Public Relations Coordinator

Mark Your Calendars... FRHA Summit Quickly Approaching!

Florida's Rural Health Summit, organized by the Florida Rural Health Association, will be held December 7-8, 2006 at the Orlando Marriott Lake Mary in Lake Mary, Florida. This year's theme is "Smart Growth In Rural Florida— Impacts on Our



Health." Rural health professionals, advocates, and anyone interested in learning more about rural health in Florida is encouraged to register for this informational conference. The conference agenda includes sessions on telepharmacy, Medicaid Impacts

on Rural Communities, Rural EMS, Rural Policy Update, Ethical Issues and Public Health, and the impacts of rural growth on our health.

The Florida Rural Health Association was developed to bring together individuals with an interest in rural health care and human services. The Association is dedicated to ensuring that

residents of rural communities have access to a continuum of affordable health care services; to advocate for public policy initiatives; to facilitate those services; and to strengthen rural communities. For more information on the FRHA Summit in December or FRHA annual membership please visit www.flrha.org or call 386-462-1551.

Network Hosts Medicaid Reform Presentation

On September 18, 2006, a group of twenty local rural health care and social service providers gathered at Inn on the Lakes in Sebring to listen to a presentation on Florida's Medicaid Reform initiatives. Rob Lombardo, Executive Director of the Big Bend Rural Health Network and Lucia Maxwell, an independent consultant, presented a power point presentation which delineated the history of Florida's Medicaid Reform initiatives and brought the group up to date as to current reform developments. Mr. Lombardo also presented a comprehensive array of ideas pertaining to how Rural Health Networks can prepare themselves for a significant role in Medicaid Reform programs. Objectives emphasized in the reform initiative include the improvement of consumer choices, having a predictable budget, tailoring benefits to various populations, expanding managed care in rural counties, reducing fraud, and targeting chronically ill. At this time, the items that could change under the reform would include the possible elimination of Medipass and fee for service reimbursement. The State envisions contracting with managed care plans to provide all health care services. All contracts would be pre-paid/per capita and the legislature would define dollar contribution each year. Rates would be adjusted based on enrollees' health status. Plans may change benefits to target groups if

value and "sufficiency" are maintained. So, how does all of this impact our rural communities? According to Mr. Lombardo, the good news may include higher reimbursement rates for chronic illness in the population. If consumer choice plans are maintained the Medipass program will continue for some time and there would be a greater emphasis on disease management, specialty networks, and tele-health infrastructure. The bad news for rural communities is the rural Medicaid reimbursement rates are lower, there is a dependence on specialty services in urban centers, rural providers often have little or no experience with joint contracting or prepaid reimbursement, and rural physicians prefer solo practice and cannot afford reductions in Medicaid reimbursement due to large caseloads, and lastly, *Rural Capitation* rates start lower due to "historical utilization" (although this may be restored by "burden of illness" increases). There is a timetable for Medicaid Reform which includes "Pilot Programs" in Broward and Duvall Counties (2006-2008); expansion to rural Baker, Nassau and Clay Counties in 2007-2008, and the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) will select expansion counties in 2009-2010 and in 2011; expansion into other areas of Florida. It is thought that statewide expansion



will first go to areas with at least one HMO. These Reform initiatives are not set in stone and could change based on numerous factors including the election of a new governor and new legislative leadership, HMO success with new multiple benefit plans, success of the rural Medicaid pilot projects, AHCA's systems for determining rates and "burden of illness", federal Medicaid Reform initiatives, and stakeholder and general public reaction to the proposed changes. Heartland Rural Health Network will continue to follow the Medicaid Reform Initiatives in Florida and keep members informed of any significant changes in the near future. These changes won't happen overnight, but it is important for rural health care providers and organizations to keep apprised of this initiative so our rural voices are heard. The Network staff would like to thank Mr. Lombardo and Ms. Maxwell for speaking on this important topic as well as all individuals who attended this excellent presentation.

"It is thought that statewide expansion of the Medicaid Reform Program will first go to areas with at least one HMO"

Network Staff Selected For NRHA Rural Health Fellows Program

Heartland Rural Health Network congratulates Kelly J. Johnson, Health Planning Director, for her selection as a Rural Health Fellow for the National Rural Health Associations Rural Health Fellows Program (RHF) of 2007. The RHF program is a year-long, intensive program

that develops leaders who can articulate a clear and compelling vision for rural America. NRHA has partnered with Healthcare Performance Solutions, a company with experience training rural health providers to become leaders, to provide appropriate content for the RHF program. Fel-

lows gain valuable insights and build critical skills in three primary domains including personal, team, organizational leadership; health policy analysis and advocacy; and NRHA governance and structure. Fellows receive specialized training in conjunction with three NRHA educational

events and additional trainings occur via conference calls or additional RHF educational retreats. The NRHA received 60 applications from across the country for the 2007 Fellows Program and from these applications 15 fellows and 2 alternates were selected. Congratulations Kelly!

Network Receives Additional Grants For Outreach Program

Heartland Rural Health Network (HRHN) was recently awarded two additional grants that will help build the infrastructure of the Heartland Rural Health Services Outreach Program, which serves the homeless and uninsured residents of Highlands, Hardee, and DeSoto Counties. In September, HRHN received notification that they were awarded \$15,000.00 from the

Sisters of Bon Secours USA Ministry Grant. In October, HRHN was awarded \$11,064.78 from the Florida Department of Children & Families, Office on Homelessness Grant-In-Aid. Both grants will substantially help the Outreach Program by providing staff support and additional health care vouchers for the uninsured and homeless who need access services but

are unable to afford services due to lack health insurance and financial support. Both grants are one-year grants and are applied for annually. If you know someone who is uninsured or homeless and needs access to health care or social services please call 863-452-6530 to refer the individual to the HRHS Outreach Program. The individual will be screened to determine eligibility for services.



Local Programs Receive Homeless Grant-In-Aid Funding

Highlands and Hardee County health care and social service provider agencies involved in their local homeless coalitions recently received Grant-In-Aid funding provided through the Florida Department of Children & Families, Office on Homelessness. The purpose of this funding is to provide assistance to local agencies to assist persons within their communities who have become or

are about to become homeless and assist with self-sufficiency.

There are a wide variety of eligible programs that funds can be applied towards.

The 2006-2007 Grant-In-Aid awards for Highlands and Hardee Counties are as follows:

◇ \$11,064.78 Heartland Rural Health Network will assist homeless in receiving health



services.

◇ \$5,024.91 Hardee Help Center will offer food, clothing, rental assistance

◇ \$4,019.93 Alpha & Omega Ministries will provide commodity resource and a case manager.

◇ \$3,014.96 Highlands County Human Services will purchase food for persons who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

◇ \$2,791.62 Highlands County Coalition for the Homeless, Inc. will use funding for administrative costs to operate the Coalition

◇ \$2,000.00 Cutting Edge Ministries of Hardee County will use funding to purchase food commodities.

A total of \$27,916.20 was split among these organizations. Congratulations to these agencies!

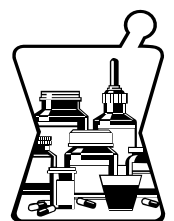
DeSoto Health Resources' Prescription For Community Success

DeSoto Health Resources, Inc., a non-profit Prescription Assistance program located in Arcadia, was recently awarded a \$30,000 grant from the Sisters of Bon Secours. This grant will help DeSoto County residents who are uninsured and have little to no income obtain urgent/emergent medications at no cost to the individual. DHRI has been operating in DeSoto County since 2004 and although they are able to assist

eligible individuals obtain their maintenance medications (taken for an extended period of time) through the Pharmaceutical Companies at little to no cost, there has been minimal funding available for individuals not able to wait the average 4-6 weeks for the medications to be delivered from the drug company to the client's doorstep. This generous grant award provides funding to aid individuals in purchasing medications they need right away

(antibiotics, diabetic, heart, etc). DHRI has recently established a partnership with St. Vincent DePaul Pharmacy of Pt. Charlotte (SVDP). SVDP offers a fully operational pharmacy staffed by volunteer pharmacists. This partnership will provide DHRI with prescription medications for DeSoto County residents at no cost. Once a week prescriptions will be filled at SVDP and a courier will transport them to the local DeSoto Health Department for

issuance. Valid prescriptions are required and clients are screened for eligibility. This partnership provides DHRI and the community with much needed support for helping aid individuals in obtaining their medications. For more information on DHRI, to refer a client for services, or learn more about the SVDP partnership please contact Sue Leverage-Grossman, Program Coordinator, at 863-494-1351



Safe Sleep for Babies: To Bed Share or Not to Bed Share?



Bed sharing— babies sleeping in an adult bed with a parent or caregiver— is increasing in the United States. The CPSC reports more than 100 deaths of infants under age 2 associated with bed sharing over a 2 year period. Proponents state that bed sharing contributes to longer periods of breastfeeding, and that it may protect infants by increasing infant awakenings, decreasing the time spent in deep sleep, and increasing the mother’s awareness of the infant. Oppo-

nents cite that the potential hazards outweigh these potential benefits by placing baby at risk of suffocation by being trapped between the bed and wall, frame, headboard, or footboard, and possibly being rolled over by an adult. *Since 2005, 7 babies in Polk County and 2 in Highlands County died from suffocation while bed sharing or co-sleeping.* Many parents and caregivers are unaware of the hidden hazards of bed sharing.

Recommendations for safe sleeping and reducing risk include:

- ◇ Separate sleeping environment for babies
- ◇ Always place baby to sleep on their back
- ◇ Don’t smoke around baby
- ◇ Keep baby’s sleep area free of soft, fluffy bedding and stuffed toys

- ◇ Use a firm mattress and safety approved crib
- ◇ Avoid overdressing baby with layers of clothing

The Healthy Start Coalition of Polk, Highlands, and Hardee Counties has launched a “Beds 4 Babies” Campaign to increase awareness about the potential risks of suffocation and how to prevent these tragedies. With a generous donation by the Polk Early Learning Coalition and additional funding from Heartland For Children, families not able to afford a safe place to sleep may be eligible for a portable crib. For more information about safe sleeping or cribs please contact the Coalition office at 863-297-3043.

Article contributed by Mary Jo Plews, Healthy Start Coalition Executive Director



Hardee County Health Department Offers Diabetes Programs To The Public

The Hardee County Health Department is pleased to offer diabetes classes as part of their Diabetes Prevention & Control Program for Hardee County residents who are diabetic or pre-diabetic. This program teaches individuals how to take care of their diabetes, how to prevent diabetes if an individual is at risk, nutrition counseling, and physical activity opportunities. Each person

enrolled in the Diabetes Prevention and Control program receives approximately \$1,000 worth of services at no charge. Classes are held every Wednesday for four consecutive weeks and individuals can choose between a morning session and an afternoon session. To participate in a class, a referral form from a primary care physician is needed. The next session of classes will begin on January 10th. If you are inter-

ested or know someone who is interested in participating please contact the HCHD at 863-773-4161 to enroll.

The HCHD Diabetes Prevention Program will also host a wellness series this Holiday season. All sessions are open to the public but individuals interested in attending are asked to RSVP for planning purposes. The times for each of the topics

is 12 pm-1 pm and 5:15 pm-6:15 pm. November 29th the topic is Small Steps, Big Rewards; December 6th is Stress Management; and December 13th is Healthy Holiday Eating. To RSVP please call 863-773-4161

Article contributed by Erin Hess, Health Promotion/Education Coordinator

Network Welcomes New Outreach Program Staff Member

Please give a warm welcome to Victor Alvarez, Case Manager for the Network’s Rural Health Services Outreach Program (HRHS). Victor will work with homeless and uninsured clients

within Highlands, Hardee, and DeSoto Counties as well as working closely with various health care and social service providers that provide services to this popu-

lation. Victor has a solid background in social services and will make an excellent addition to the Outreach Program. To refer an individual or for more informa-

tion on the HRHS Outreach Program please contact Victor at 863-452-6530.





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Editor's Notes

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The Network would like to thank all readers who returned the Newsletter Survey last February. We appreciate your feedback and have utilized several of the suggestions to reformat our newsletter. You will notice a new "lay-out" that we hope is a bit easier to read. Also, Network News will only be printed twice a year rather than quarterly—one publication in Winter and one in Summer. Our readership goes beyond Network Board Members and Network Members, but also reaches organizations and agencies that the Network is actively involved with in community coalitions and various other community programs. We encourage anyone of our readers to contact Kelly Johnson, Network Health Planning Director, if they would like to have a brief article put into the Newsletter highlighting recent accomplishments of your organization, group, or coalition or activities that may be coming up that others may be interested in. For those who enjoy reading the Newsletter online we are excited to announce that Network News will also be available in PDF format on the Network's website, which is currently undergoing a "make-over." Please check back as there will be many updates offered on the newly designed website. As always, your comments and feedback are always welcome. The goal of our Newsletter is to highlight Network activities, but also recognize the many agencies and organizations that the Network collaborates with on various community activities. We hope everyone has a wonderful Holiday Season!

