Colorado Conversations: Engaging Colorado Communities in Healthcare Policy and Advocacy

Discussions about healthcare policy currently receive attention at the local, state and national levels. The Colorado Area Health Education Center (AHEC) System and five regional AHEC centers, thanks to a generous grant from The Colorado Trust’s Access to Health Initiative, have established a new program called "Colorado Conversations for Better Healthcare." This program is designed to increase awareness, education and involvement of citizens throughout Colorado in ongoing discussions about healthcare policy. Serving as a neutral convener and facilitator of these conversations across the state, AHEC aims to foster dialogue regarding issues of healthcare policy and to empower Colorado residents to voice their views effectively. To date, Central Colorado AHEC has completed eight Colorado Conversations for Better Healthcare Policy:

Two of these conversations, held in collaboration with The Spring Institute and the Colorado Progressive Coalition, gathered feedback from community members about the status of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) patients in healthcare settings. These lively LEP conversations were facilitated at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, and at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs Beth-El College with broad audience representation. Two additional dialogues occurred in conjunction with a student-led Health Action Conference; the groups’ support for comprehensive LEP services was tempered with the reality of fiscal constraints, time, resources and local differences.

Three conversations that elicited feedback about the status of workforce development were facilitated with members from the Adams County Education Consortium, a break-out group at the Think Big Conference (Colorado Youth Council and Workforce Center Annual Conference), and members of the Clear Creek County Health Advisory Committee. These conversations included discussions about the development of healthcare student clinical placements.

An initial conversation to gather the opinions of community leaders’ support for the establishment of an on-site employee health center was held at Peak Vista Community Health Center.

Our conversations include the use of audience polling devices. This is empowering for our participants and communities, as it provides the opportunity for participants to express their opinions on an issue, and displays immediate audience feedback. To schedule a conversation, call Jessica Sweeney at 303-724-4399.
We’re Engaged!

“We’re engaged, because a patient doesn’t have a problem that is their problem, but it is a problem that matters to the patient.”

But where does that medical research occur? Where do those questions come from? Where does education occur? The academic medical center…?

The University of Colorado Denver Anschutz Medical Center (UCD-AMC) strives to take research and education out into the community. We believe that often the best clinical questions come from the community: the patient who has a health concern, the provider who needs to solve some clinical problem, the neighborhood group that wants to improve their local community. And often, the community may be the best place to find the answer. The Department of Family Medicine hosts several practice-based research networks (PBRNs). A PBRN is a collection of practices and communities that collaborate with some academic researchers to ask and answer healthcare questions that matter to the community, the providers, and the patients. So the High Plains Research Network engaged their rural practices and community members in a project to improve asthma diagnosis and management. The Colorado Research Network (CaReNet) engaged physicians and patients to develop a home blood pressure monitoring program. UCD engages community members, local and statewide organizational leaders, and academic researchers in the Partnership of Academic and Community for Translation Council to oversee the community engagement efforts of a large National Institutes of Health grant.

The UCD and the Area Health Education Centers (AHECs) also take health professional education out into the community. Each year hundreds of students from our health science schools spend a total of more than 800 months learning their profession from volunteer clinical faculty all over the state. There are pharmacists in Sterling and Dentists in Alamosa, Nurses

Continued on page 9
Southeastern AHEC has completed year one with the Colorado Prevention Center and the Health-e-Solutions II Program in Huerfano County. The program is an effort to improve cardiovascular health in the southeast region. The program works with a community health worker from a local agency to identify at-risk individuals in the community. The community health worker provides outreach through screenings, then navigation into needed lifestyle intervention programs and/or medical homes, and also follow-up contact and screenings. The program will continue in Huerfano County and also get underway in Canon City.

The 9Health Fair season for 2009 has also been completed in the southeast region. The Health-e-Solutions II Program provided lipid screenings, Framingham risk scores with recommendations, and follow-up calls to at-risk participants. The program was offered at the Leadville and Cotopaxi 9Health Fairs with over 200 participants.

On July 1, SECAHEC expanded its staff and programs by entering into a new partnership with Consortia for Older Adult Wellness (COAW) and the Healthy Aging Service System (HASS). Jo Stinchcomb, Region Two Coordinator for HASS, is a welcome addition to the SECAHEC staff, bringing with her seven years of experience in older adult wellness programs and contacts throughout SECAHEC’s region.

Although COAW works with many evidence-based programs, the major program focus currently is Healthier Living Colorado™ (HLC), a chronic conditions self-management program. HLC offers classes designed to empower adults with chronic conditions to more effectively manage their symptoms and make healthier choices in their daily lives. Participant feedback from the classes is very positive; attendees consistently say that they have renewed optimism regarding their futures and their ability to lead normal lives. Classes typically meet once a week for six weeks, and are taught by trained community members. Working with public health and community organizations, SECAHEC participants are referred to classes through their doctors’ offices, by local public health departments, through senior/community centers, and by word-of-mouth. HLC classes are currently offered in many areas of Colorado, in a variety of languages.

Additional classes are planned for the eastern Colorado region; to learn about a class in your community (or to set up a class, or find out how you can become a class leader) please contact Jo Stinchcomb at 719-306-5415 or jo.stinchcomb@secahec.org, or Callie Preheim at callie@coaw.org.
Plains Partnership for Health Wins Remote Partner of Year Award

Operation Frontline Colorado (OF) presented Centennial AHEC’s Plains Partnership for Health the Remote Partner of the Year 2009 award for conducting healthy low-cost cooking classes in Kit Carson and Cheyenne Counties. The Plains Partnership for Health, funded by The Colorado Trust, is collaborating with Burlington’s Prairie Family Center (which has a grant from The Colorado Health Foundation) to conduct OF’s Side-by-Side classes to at no cost to 34 area residents.

Operation Frontline is a nationwide organization whose mission is to end childhood hunger by offering classes that promote healthy food choices even for those with limited resources. Classes teach lifelong skills that include practical nutrition, cooking, and budgeting. The recipes used in OF classes typically cost $1.50 or less per serving.

The Colorado Trust recently awarded Centennial AHEC a two-and-a-half year Phase II Partnership for Health award to continue healthy lifestyle activities on the Eastern Plains.

CAHEC Hosts 20th Annual Nurse Educator Conference

The Nurse Educator Conference in the Rockies is Colorado’s longest-running annual nursing conference. It provides a forum for nurse educators to discuss the latest research and innovative strategies to meet the challenges of contemporary nursing education.

A distinguished panel of nationally recognized experts assembled this year to present topics to faculty from all levels and settings of nursing education. Dr. Fay Raines, president of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, opened the conference with a keynote address on the challenges and opportunities facing nursing and healthcare in today’s world. She called for the individual and collective voices of nursing to be heard on all fronts.

Approximately 250 nurse educators from across the United States, Canada and the Virgin Islands attended this year’s conference. More than half had been to NEC at least once prior and expressed how much they enjoy the conference and benefit from the program each time. Comments were overwhelmingly positive and many of our veteran attendees stated this year’s conference was the “best yet.”
Southern Colorado Clinical Nurse Scholar Program

In response to the well-documented need for nursing instruction in Colorado, the SLVAHEC is acting as co-sponsor of the Southern Colorado Clinical Nurse Scholar Program. Thanks to the teamwork of numerous health organizations from Pueblo, Eastern Colorado and the San Luis Valley, 32 practicing nurses from the SLVAHEC and SECAHEC regions have had the opportunity to participate in this three-day training program. The program is designed for education- and hospital-based clinical faculty that supervise clinical experiences for nursing students (the goal of the program is to increase the statewide supply and instructional skills of such supervisors). Trainings have been held in October 2008 and May 2009; the next training will take place in October 2009. For more information, please contact Becky Darnall at 719-587-6302 or Rebecca.Darnall@slvrmc.org.

Grow Your Own: Engaging Community in Health Workforce

Twenty Summer Health Careers Institute (SHCI) students from the San Luis Valley participated in the statewide SHCI in Denver in June 2009. SLVAHEC, in conjunction with Rocky Mountain SER Jobs for Progress, then placed the students in summer employment in health-related institutions in their home towns. In this program, the students gain work skills as well as learning about the healthcare industry, thereby strengthening their interest in pursuing a health-related career. When the academic year resumes, the students will take part in the Summer Health Careers Guild.

Welcome New SLVAHEC Staff!

The SLVAHEC, with a grant from the Colorado Prevention Center, has hired two Community Health Workers (CHWs) for Year II of the Colorado Heart Healthy Solutions Program: Roberta Barela will work in Alamosa County, while Lisa Jaquez will be based in Costilla County. These CHWs, both Certified Nursing Assistants, will conduct cardiovascular risk screening events at a variety of community locations. Each screening includes a blood pressure check, cholesterol test, blood glucose test and a computerized cardiovascular disease risk assessment. The CHWs will assist in finding local medical providers and lifestyle programs that will work with “at-risk” individuals for little or no charge.

Leticia Cepeda, an entering Adams State College nursing student, will join SLVAHEC as a work-study student this academic year. She is already providing excellent support to the organization; we are fortunate to have such great young talent join the SLVAHEC team.
Central Colorado AHEC is delighted to announce that we have begun an innovative model that we believe is replicable in other regions of Colorado. This two-year project, “Overcoming the Healthcare Student Clinical Bottleneck: A Four-County Collaborative Initiative,” is designed to reduce the healthcare workforce shortage by creating a multidisciplinary, rural and urban community-based collaboration. The primary purpose of this program, which is funded by the Colorado Health Foundation, is to increase access to care for underserved populations in this region with multiple focused activities.

All three non-profits: Adams County Education Consortium (Sandra Steiner, Executive Director), Central Colorado AHEC (Kris Wenzel, Executive Director) and Colorado Center for Nursing Excellence (Deb Center, Clinical Placement Platform) are excited to support this innovative use of community-based recruiter/mentors and the other focus areas. In collaboration with three workforce centers, four high school districts, three community colleges and local healthcare providers and educators, we look forward to impacting access to care for underserved populations in Adams, Arapahoe, Denver and Jefferson counties.

One focus is on increasing healthcare student clinical placement and instructor capacity. The two clinical site recruiters for this grant project are Kelly Dominguez and Caitlin Williams. Kelly and Caitlin will be contacting and meeting with potential new clinical sites to explore their needs and opportunities for new clinical student placements and identification/development of healthcare clinical preceptors. They can be contacted through Central Colorado AHEC at: 303-724-4725 or 303-724-4726.

Simultaneously, another focus of this program is to provide a set of healthcare specific occupational counseling tools to high school and community college students (1000 targeted) via an online HealthCare readiness self-awareness tool and occupational counseling support from workforce center staff. Coaching and registration with the Workforce Centers will also offer these individuals workplace linkages simultaneously.

The third outcome will be a recognition event to acknowledge clinical locations and reward exceptional facilities and participating education providers. The first annual event is planned for March 2010.

The stakes in healthcare workforce development are high: OUR daily health status! Reduced healthcare shortages impact access to healthcare services, and we believe that this new view through this partnership will reveal solutions not seen even six months ago!

Celebrating Excellence in Human Caring: 25th Annual Nightingale Awards

Nominations are due December 4, 2009 for participants in the 2010 Colorado Nightingale Event, 25th Year of Celebrating Excellence in Human Caring, which will take place on May 1, 2010 at the Renaissance Hotel in Denver, Colorado. Nominations sent to the five regional Colorado AHEC Centers and local regional committees will be reviewed and 15 regional finalists will be selected and honored at the regional events in March 2010. For online registration information, please visit www.centralcoahec.org.
CAHEC On-Line Nursing Refresher Available to Communities Throughout Colorado

What is a nurse to do, if it has been years since she or he has been in the clinical arena and a return to practice is desired? The expansion of information and technology in all areas of health care has greatly impacted the delivery of nursing care. The preparation of a nurse today is an intensive process, and demands skills and knowledge that were unheard of even a decade ago. Therefore, continuing education is a must for all nurses today; graduation from school is only the beginning of lifelong learning.

To return to practice, a current nursing license in the state of residence is required. Colorado has taken a stand on the absence from nursing practice by requiring a refresher course for nurses out of practice for more than three years. If a license has lapsed, a refresher course is required before a new license can be issued. This means an extensive didactic and clinical program, passing a written test and a supervised clinical practicum. For those living in an area close to a medical center, university or community college the access is easier. For those living in more remote areas, this can be challenging.

This challenge was the motivation for the development of an on-line course that would make re-entry into nursing a possibility to anyone in Colorado. In 2003, Central Colorado AHEC (CAHEC), in collaboration with faculty of two other RN Refresher courses (Front Range Community College of Larimer, and Bethel College of Nursing of Colorado Springs) made this a reality.

The course is divided into modules and has the student progress at her or his pace. After successfully maneuvering through the material, the student can apply to take the final exam. With a passing grade, the nurse may apply to return to the clinical area of choice under the guidance of a clinical preceptor. A skills check list must be completed to the satisfaction of the preceptor, at which point the state Board of Nursing will re-issue a license to practice.

In addition to the all online RN Refresher course, CAHEC partners with Arapahoe Community College (ACC) to provide a “blended” program that includes both online learning and a skills lab. For further information regarding the registration, fee and course prerequisites, please go to our website at www.centralcoahec.org or call Jenny Dull at 303-724-0335.
Western Colorado Students Make the Most of SHCI

My name is Alex Sherwood and, as Education Coordinator for Western Colorado AHEC, I was fortunate enough to participate in this year’s Summer Health Career Institute as a counselor. I could not have asked for a more positive experience, or emphasize enough what a nice, smart and fun group of students I had.

Each day was packed with fun, and offered one tremendous learning experience after another. Monday we visited the Community College of Aurora, where we participated in an amazing EMS simulation, a DNA isolation and a chemistry lab, followed by visits to two different long-term care facilities. After visiting with residents, playing games and participating in music therapy with them, the students came away with a deep appreciation of these lovely elders. The evening offered assessments of personality type and learning style, and an inspiring lecture on how to succeed in college.

On Tuesday we went to the University of Colorado Denver’s Anschutz Medical Campus, where students took part in patient interviews. The “patients” were actors who came in to test our students’ listening skills. This was a tremendous opportunity for students to get feedback, and everyone was up to the challenge. We also went on tours of the School of Dental Medicine, The Children’s Hospital and the Center for Animal Laboratory Care. After the tours the students had the opportunity to speak with health professions students. The SHCI students found this opportunity to be of great use to them.

At Wednesday’s Health Career Expo the students had hands-on experiences (using simulators) in Pharmacy, Obstetrics, Endoscopy, Anesthesiology, Physical Therapy, Surgery and Radiology. We saw a cadaver in the anatomy lab, and performed a sheep eye dissection. That evening we visited the Museum of Natural History and participated in their health exhibit.

Thursday was job shadow day. All the students dressed up and embraced their assignments. This was the high point of the week’s activities. The students’ participation and enthusiasm were wonderful; being a counselor at the Summer Health Career Institute was one of the best experiences I have ever had. I am grateful for the opportunity and I hope I can do it again.
We’re Engaged!

continued from page 2

in Colorado Springs and Pueblo, and Family Doctors in Craig, Steamboat, Gunnison. There are hundreds of volunteer faculty who teach their profession to students. Education is also out in the community, in rural and underserved clinics, with patients who live normal everyday lives. The conditions are common, the education is outstanding, and the learning lasts a lifetime. Engaging practicing healthcare professionals in the education of our students assures that their training is relevant, practical, and helpful to patients and communities throughout Colorado.

This year the annual AHEC meeting has joined together with the State Networks Of Colorado Practices and Partners (SNOCAP) as a way to combine our community engagement efforts. Engaging Community in Education and Research provides avenues for advancing academics, partners for promoting important medical research, and conversations for improving healthcare in Colorado. A hearty thank you to all the clinical faculty who so generously share your time and energy with our students; an enthusiastic thank you to the providers, practices, and patients that partner with us in research; and a wholehearted thank you to the community members who share their time and talents with our AHECs, our researchers, and the University.

I hope that you engage your community, I hope that you engage your AHEC, and I hope you engage your University. Come join us; we’re all engaged.

Colorado AHEC: Making a Difference in FAS

Colorado AHEC is involved in an exciting new Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) prevention project. Colorado AHEC’s COFAS-POP (Colorado Fetal Alcohol and Other Pre-Natal Drug Exposure Prevention Outreach Project), along with community partners from the SNOCAP (State Networks of Colorado Ambulatory Practices & Partners) network, are implementing a program to train healthcare providers in screening and brief intervention to prevent drinking during pregnancy. Within the SNOCAP network, the High Plains Research Network, and the CaReNet and Bighorn practices have all agreed to participate. The goal of the program is to help prevent FASD throughout Colorado. It is our hope that this model can be implemented across states to ensure that providers are adequately trained to address at-risk drinking behaviors. For more information, please contact Pamela Gillen at 303-724-0327 or pamela.gillen@ucdenver.edu.
MyAHEC

Colorado AHEC is now offering an exciting new resource. What is it? It is...Facebook for health careers. It is...created just for Colorado AHEC System Summer Health Career Institute participants. It is...MyAHEC! Here students will be able to access valuable resources, get updates for possible job shadow days and other great activities. They will also be able to chat with other students and create their own profile. Pictures from the 2009 Summer Health Career Institute are posted and students may also upload their own individual photos. MyAHEC is sponsored by a grant from The Colorado Trust.

Racheal Keller, who was the Colorado AHEC System Student Assistant during the 2009 Summer Health Career Institute, will be administering the MyAHEC site. She will keep in touch with the 2009 Summer Health Career Institute participants, informing them about job shadowing opportunities, answering questions they may have about their health career pathway and more. Racheal is a pre-Med Student so she understands what the other students are going through! For more information contact Racheal at Racheal.Keller@ucdenver.edu.

Introducing Racheal Keller

We are delighted to welcome Racheal Keller to the Colorado AHEC System Office. Racheal will be assisting with grant work and special projects, as well as administering the MyAHEC website (MyAHEC is an online networking space for Summer Health Career Institute participants). Racheal is a University of Colorado Denver, Downtown Campus Pre-Med Student and a part of the Aurora LIGHTS program.
Health Professions Scholars Award

This year, the Colorado AHEC System, with support from The Colorado Trust, is awarding 22 scholarships to graduate level health professions students from around the state of Colorado. Scholarships totaling $570,000 were awarded to students who agree to work for two years in a rural or urban underserved setting upon completion of their education. Awards range in amounts of $15,000 for full-time enrollment and $7,500 for part-time.

These scholarships are provided through a grant from The Colorado Trust. This is the second year of the scholarship program. Last year there were 18 scholarships awards for a total of 40 scholarships to date (7 from Centennial AHEC, 11 from Central Colorado AHEC, 6 from San Luis Valley AHEC, 8 from Southeastern Colorado AHEC and 8 from Western Colorado AHEC).

Scholarships have been granted to students from institutions throughout Colorado, including: Colorado State University Pueblo (Nursing); Red Rocks Community College (Physician Assistant); Regis University (Physical Therapy); Rocky Vista University (Osteopathic Medicine); University of Colorado Denver/Anschutz Medical Campus (Child Health Advocate/Physician Assistant, College of Nursing, Physical Therapy, School of Dental Medicine, School of Medicine, School of Pharmacy); University of Colorado at Colorado Springs (Beth El College of Nursing); University of Denver (Morgridge College of Education); University of Northern Colorado (Nursing).

“I am honored to have been selected as a recipient of the Colorado Trust Health Professions Scholarship. The generous award will help immensely in funding my Doctor of Physical Therapy program. I look forward to practicing Women’s Health Physical Therapy in Western Colorado upon my graduation.”

Amber Matthews, 2009-2011 Recipient

“I humbly thank you and the rest of Colorado AHEC for awarding me The Colorado Trust scholarship for 2009. Over the next several years I will work tirelessly toward achieving the Colorado Trust’s goal of accessible healthcare for all Coloradans, especially those in rural and underserved areas. Thank you again for your generous support.”

David Baumgartner, 2009-2011 Recipient

Target groups for this scholarship include graduate level nursing students who plan to teach or practice in a rural community, and pharmacy, dental, physician assistant, physical therapy, psychology and nurse practitioner students who plan to practice in a rural community. By supporting students with rural and urban underserved experiences and aspirations, the Colorado Trust scholarship will result in more students entering a rural or urban underserved practice.

Applications for the 2010-2012 Health Professions Scholarship will be available next May 2010. Interested applicants may apply by going to the Colorado AHEC System website (http://hschealth.uchsc.edu/ahec/). Only online applications are accepted. For more information, please contact Beth Ingram at 303.724.0348.
Community-Based Cavity-Free at Three Infant Oral Health Program Moves to Colorado AHEC

More young children in Colorado will be able to avoid dental disease as a successful oral health program targeting children expands to its new home with Colorado AHEC.

Cavity-Free at Three (CF3), a statewide effort to prevent oral disease in children from infancy to age three, is moving from a foundation-run program to a permanent home with Colorado AHEC. CF3 is a three-year, $1.5 million effort on the part of six local health foundations: Caring for Colorado Foundation; The Colorado Health Foundation; The Colorado Trust; Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation; Kaiser Permanente; and Rose Community Foundation. The foundations launched the effort in 2007 and went to communities statewide with a technical assistance team to train physicians, dentists, dental hygienists, public health nurses and other health professionals on how to prevent dental disease in young children. This program is now being implemented in communities across Colorado.

Under the direction of Jack Westfall, MD, MPH, Director of Colorado AHEC, CF3 will expand its reach as the program takes advantage of the statewide efforts of the AHEC program. Westfall says AHEC will help incorporate the CF3 training into the curricula of the University of Colorado Schools of Medicine, Nursing and Dental Medicine. According to Westfall, students who are part of the University’s Interprofessional Rural Track will receive additional exposure and education on CF3. The Colorado AHEC and its outstanding group of technical advisors will educate primary care providers, public health workers and dentists throughout Colorado. They will work in a variety of settings, in dozens of community sites, with an emphasis on safety-net and public health clinics. Community marketing efforts will help educate the public about the importance of establishing a dental home for a child by age one.

For more information about the program, contact Karen Savoie, Education Director of CF3 at karen.savoie@ucdenver.edu, or CF3 Program Coordinator Susan Evans at susan.evans@ucdenver.edu.
Engaging Students in Health Care Advocacy: Second Annual Health Action Conference

This past August saw the second annual Health Action Conference (HAC), organized by the leaders of the Colorado Medical Society Medical Student Section (CMS-MSS). The three main objectives of this event are: to raise the profile of health access and advocacy issues on the University of Colorado Denver Anschutz Medical Campus (UCDAMC); to perform meaningful student-led service in our new Aurora home; and to welcome students to our action-oriented and conscientious student body.

On August 21 over 70 students, faculty, and community leaders attended the HAC, which took place at the UCD-AMC. Chris Adams, the founder and president of The Adams Group, kicked off the conference with a keynote address regarding the role of physicians within health care reform. Participants then attended break-out sessions on topics such as: limited language proficiency and effective health care delivery; investment in future health care workers with Mini Medical School; development of honest conversations around education and science through the Café Scientifique model; current updates on the health care debate; and access to care among rural communities.

On August 22 students and faculty clinicians from the UCD-AMC, along with high school students from the Aurora Lights Program, partnered with staff of Metro Community Provider Network to provide a free health fair at North Aurora Family Health Services (NAFHS). Over 100 families from the Aurora Public School District attended the event, where they had access to free vaccinations, dental screenings and vital signs screenings, as well low-cost sports physicals for children. Colorado Area Health Education Center Systems (AHEC) provided free blood pressure and glucose screenings; Health Care for All Coloradans provided free BMI checks; Colorado Asian Health Education and Promotion provided free lipid and cholesterol panels; Envision Colorado provided free vision screenings; and Shindoll’s Acupuncture provided free acupuncture.

Key sponsors for this event included: AHEC, MCPN, LEADS, CMS-MSS, and the Medical Student Council. We hope that in subsequent years the HAC will engage more students in health policy, create a more active student body for better health care access in Colorado, and continue to provide free services to the community in which we reside.
Teaching Endoscopy to Rural Physicians to Improve Access to Colorectal Cancer Screening

Colorectal Cancer (CRC) is currently the third leading cause of cancer death in the United States, with an overall lifetime risk of developing the disease at 1 in 19 persons (5.3%). Recent data shows that further advanced cancer at diagnosis directly relates to a decreased chance of survival. Five-year survival rates range from less than 10% for those diagnosed with late stage colorectal cancer to greater than 90% for those diagnosed early.

The American Cancer Society advises all individuals over age 50 to be regularly screened for CRC, yet fewer than 30% of Americans in this age group are screened as indicated. One barrier to appropriate screening is lack of access to colonoscopy (this can particularly be a challenge in rural states such as Colorado). Therefore, Colorado AHEC developed the Teaching Endoscopy to Rural Physicians to Improve Access to Colorectal Cancer Screening program. The aim of the program is to teach rural primary care physicians to perform colonoscopy, which has traditionally been a procedure performed only by specialists.

Dr. Mark Deutchman, a graduate of the program, is a family physician at the University of Colorado Hospital. He currently works one to two days a month at the Salud clinic in Commerce City, providing approximately 60 colonoscopies per year to patients that “would not have received colonoscopies otherwise.” He states, “It is providing service to people who otherwise wouldn’t get it because of money. These people are now getting the same service they would get in the hospital.” Another graduate of the program, Dr. Jeffrey Cook, is a family physician who practices at Salud in Fort Morgan. He has done two to four colonoscopies a week for the past two years. He states, “These are patients that otherwise would not get colonoscopies. A fair number of them have insurance, but it does not cover colonoscopies. Through this program, they are covered.” Over the past two years he has diagnosed roughly 10 cases of CRC as well as many advanced precancerous polyps.

The training program has three unique facets. First, physicians complete online didactic sessions which consist of basic anatomy, physiology, and epidemiology as well as CRC screening education. Second, simulator experiences are performed at one of three regional AHEC centers in the state. The simulator provides multiple cases of varying difficulty as well as different clinical findings. Third, proctored colonoscopy cases are completed with a skilled physician in the trainee’s own office or hospital. This method allows physicians to gain the confidence and competency necessary to perform colonoscopies in their practice.

Regarding the simulator, Dr. Ernie Castro, another graduate of the program, states, “The endoscopy simulator was surprisingly accurate. You wouldn’t expect it. It’s actually very good.” Dr. Castro is a family physician practicing in Lakewood with a schedule including three half days per week devoted to colonoscopies. He performs 12-15 procedures per week, stating, “It’s a much bigger part of my practice than I ever imagined. I’ve completed close to 800 procedures over the last two years.” Dr. Castro admits that doing colonoscopies can be difficult, but that the proctoring he received was “fantastic.” He had an “excellent instructor, who clearly had a lot of experience in the area.” He “was very pleased with the training program.” Some graduates of the program have become so competent with the procedure that they are now proctoring other physicians. Dr. Jeremy King is a family physician trained in the program, who now practices at the University of Nebraska. He works with an inner-city population doing 10 to 16 colonoscopies per month. His duties also include proctoring approximately 4 fourth-year family medicine fellows per year to be colonoscopy trained. While practicing in Brush, Dr. Cook proctored five to six residents from the Greeley Family Medicine program.
Along with talk of healthcare reform is the topic of the medical home. Dr. Castro points out that performing colonoscopies within the primary care practice “allows us to provide a service within our primary care group without having the patient going outside it, maintaining the medical home. Patients do appreciate staying in the organization, the continued communication with their primary care physician.” He also acknowledges the difference between primary care physicians and specialists doing endoscopies. “We do mainly screening exams as well as some symptomatic exams. We try to limit it to simpler exams and let the specialists do the rest.”

Many rural physicians worry they will encounter barriers to performing colonoscopies. Of the four physicians interviewed in this article, all commented on privileging issues. However, all four had found ways of overcoming those barriers. Dr. Castro observes, “People do need proper training, but I don’t think endoscopy is outside the scope of primary care. It’s very nice to know that the Colorado AHEC System, with a grant from the Cancer, Cardiovascular Disease and Pulmonary Disease Competitive Grants Program, has supported this. With proper training, this is something a primary care doctor can do.”

In addition to increasing access, this program provides an opportunity for primary care physicians to increase their knowledge base. Dr. Castro admits, “I am much more knowledgeable than I ever would have been in gastroenterology. The guidelines are what they are. All family docs will recommend colonoscopy at age 50, but this program has allowed me to be more knowledgeable about what the procedure is and what patients can expect.”

Since CRC is the third leading cause of cancer death in the U.S., and half of those deaths are preventable, there is a huge incentive to provide CRC screening to all Americans over the age of 50. This program has been shown to be an effective tool to increase access as evidenced by the aforementioned physicians. Dr. Cook notes, “All the cancers I have found were on screening exams or found before they were symptomatic. I have also found a ton of polyps and precancers which were prevented as well as diagnosed early based on funding from the program.” Clearly, this program has the potential to enable more rural Coloradans to receive the preventive care they need.

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Team AHEC: Community Members Raise Funds for Children’s Hospital

Team AHEC participated in the 2009 Courage Classic, an annual fundraising bicycle ride to raise money for The Children’s Hospital in Aurora, Colorado. The team’s 15 members, who included faculty, students, AHEC staff, family and friends, rode a total of 150 miles over three days. Their course began in Leadville and continued over Tennessee Pass, Battle Mountain, Vail Pass, Swan Mountain and Freemont. Team AHEC raised over $7500 to help provide care to sick children.

Team AHEC included: Eric Bartczak, Pamela Bartczak, Brenda Baumgarten, Beth Ingram, Dan Navarro, Jack Westfall, Audrey Yee, Matthew Yee-Westfall and Noah Yee-Westfall, as well as UCDHSC students Kelly Brown, Jennifer Hong, Laurie Kramer, Renee Opferman and Shawn Stone.
Health Matters

Health Professions Students Enjoy a Week Immersed in Rural Life

A diverse group of health professions students spent a week this past June in Sterling, Colorado, taking part in an immersion program sponsored by the Colorado Trust, the Kaiser Foundation, and Colorado AHEC. They toured the area, meeting with community members and experiencing what this rural community has to offer, all with an eye toward assessing health – in the broadest sense of the word. The interdisciplinary participants included pharmacy students, physician assistant students, medical students, advanced practice nurses and a psychology intern, and their spouses and children, along with faculty from the Schools of Medicine and Public Health.

On the day we arrived, we were greeted by community leaders who introduced us to the town of Sterling and the surrounding area. Speakers included the mayor, president of the junior college, the police chief, the president of the board of education, and representatives of the local clergy and hospice. Considerable news coverage was devoted to the program. For more information, please visit: http://www.9news.com/rss/article.aspx?storyid=117472; http://www.journal-advocate.com/sterling-local_news/ci_13038321; http://www.journal-advocate.com/sterling-local_news/ci_13038331; and http://www.journal-advocate.com/sterling-local_news/ci_13038341.

The students were then divided into interdisciplinary groups, each assigned to investigate how the community deals with various issues, such as: acute health care; community and economy; criminal justice and law enforcement; education; long-term care; mental health; public health and safety. The groups reported learning how closely inter-related they found these areas of community life to be, with many groups interviewing similar sets of community members and agencies in the course of their study. They also learned how many roles individual community members play.

The week’s activities included tours of the local hospital, wind farm and prison, and an HIV conference sponsored by Rural Solutions. The group was also hosted at two local ranches, where the students examined huge farm machinery up close and discussed farm injuries and safety, then had the chance to try trap shooting before enjoying a barbecue dinner with several local farmers and ranchers, and relaxing around a campfire before the sun went down.

The students’ comments about the experience were overwhelmingly positive, and this very successful event will become a permanent feature of the AHEC-sponsored interdisciplinary rural track program. We plan to repeat the experience in June of 2010, and any interested health professions students are encouraged to contact the AHEC office at 303-724-0348.