CCHS Aids Planning for Rural Health Access in Alabama

Grants from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Target Eight Southern States

Representatives of the College of Community Health Sciences participated in a March 26 meeting of key stakeholders to discuss Alabama's application for Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's "Southern Rural Access" program, an initiative to improve access to health care in the rural South. The organizational meeting/applicant workshop, held in Montgomery, included key players in Alabama's health care delivery system, health care advocates, and others interested in improving access to health care in rural areas.

"The college's unique mission, "training medical students and primary care physicians with a special emphasis on rural areas," makes it a critical player in the state's organizational efforts to apply for RWJ funds. "CCHS will be working with all components of the health care delivery system to assure that Alabama benefits from the opportunity that the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has offered us to improve health care in this state. We are committed to working with all our colleagues to achieve the best possible proposal," said John Wheat, M.D., CCHS Associate Professor of Community Medicine and Internal Medicine.

Inviters were identified by a steering committee made up of Dr. Wheat; Sandral Hullett, M.D., a graduate of the CCHS family practice residency program, member of federal health/medical advisory board, and an influential national spokesperson for rural health care; and Dr. Clyde Bargainer, Director of the Alabama Office of Rural Health in the state health department and also President of the Alabama Rural Health Association.

CCHS Senior Associate Dean William Curry, M.D., who is also University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa School of Medicine Assistant Dean for Rural Medicine, spoke at the meeting. He represented the perspective of academic medicine in Alabama and discussed "pipeline" efforts to recruit and train primary care physicians to practice in medically underserved rural areas. He cited the Rural Health Scholars and Rural Medical Scholars, CCHS programs to identify and encourage future rural practitioners that were initiated with funding from the Family Practice Rural Health Board.

Other speakers addressing access to health care in rural Alabama were Kathy Vincent speaking for Don Williamson, M.D., State Public Health Officer; James Coleman, CEO of West Alabama Health Services; and Dr. Eli Capilouto, Dean of the UAB School of Public Health.

The Southern Rural Access program of the Robert W. Johnson Foundation is designed to help improve access to basic health care in eight of the most rural, medically underserved states in the country, said Program Director Michael Beachler, who conducted the meeting on behalf of the RWJ Foundation.

A key factor for success, he said, is strong partnerships with underserved communities.

"The Foundation believes that combining promising interventions and working over a sustained period of time with a regional group of states will provide the best opportunity to improve access to care," according to the rationale in the application guidelines.

Building Rural Health Networks: to help states develop rural health network policies and develop local networks. Rural health networks are formal organizational arrangements (including physicians, hospitals, community health and social service agencies, other providers, and possibly consumers) that "use the resources of multiple organizations and specify how collaborative functions will be achieved" to help rural providers enter into and administer risk contracts with payers, assess health needs using population-based approaches, involve local residents in the decision-making processes, and retain health care dollars in local communities.

Revolving Loan Fund: to enable grant recipients to help rural communities improve their health infrastructure, using foundation funds to leverage state, federal, and private capital funds.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has made available $13.8 million over three years for the first phase of an effort to improve access to care in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, East Texas, and West Virginia. A broad consortium of stakeholders in each state must designate and support a single organization to lead activities under this program. Between $800,000 and $2.2 million per state will be available for the initial phase of the project.

Additional funding from the Foundation's 21st Century Challenge Fund (continued on page 2)
will be available later to support demonstration projects, analysis of specific problems, and projects to build capacity.

Matching funds for these grants must come from new monies provided by the consortium partners and public and private sources. In addition to Drs. Wheat and Curry, CCHS participants at the planning meeting were staff and students from rural health projects in the college: Rural Medical Scholars, Rural Health Scholars, Environmental/Occupational Health Research Project, Child Caring Initiative, and West Alabama AHEC.

**Dr. Shenkenburg to Represent Family Medicine at Conference in Peru**

Dr. Amy Shenkenburg, Chief Resident in the family medicine program here, has been chosen by the University of Alabama School of Medicine to represent family medicine for a CME course in honor.

**Residency Grads Fulfill Rural Mission of CCHS**

The Tuscaloosa Family Practice Residency, created in 1972 by the Alabama legislature, filled thirteen first year slots during the national matching process last month. Dr. Marc Armstrong, who has a master's degree in occupational and environmental health, is one of the residents.

**Faculty Notes**

*Send faculty news notes to Linda Jackson, Editor, Bar Box 870295, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487. Room 372 Nott Hall 348-1382 Fax 348-9417 (Linda's office).*

**Dr. Wheat Attends Rural Medicine Conferences**

John Wheat, M.D., Associate Professor of Behavioral and Community Medicine and Internal Medicine, participated in a strategic planning meeting for rural health and safety held in Nashville on March 5-6. The Southern Extension/Research Activity Information Exchange Group sponsored the meeting, which was organized by the Southern Regional Development Center at Mississippi State University. Dr. Wheat was leader of the discussion to assign timelines and designate responsibilities for addressing health issues in the rural South over the next three years.

Dr. Wheat will also attend the spring conference (May 27-29 in Kansas City) of the North American Consortium on Agromedicine. He is President-Elect of this organization. Conferences will visit agromedicine work sites to focus on building partnerships for health and safety in agricultural work and communities.

Topics include: agromedicine poison control, disaster interventions, family stress, violence, waste and pollutant management, pollutants and lung disease, agricultural chemicals and cancer, neurological diseases, and health and safety for the elderly. The topics are closely related to the research Dr. Wheat is conducting in his NIH-funded study on occupational and environmental health hazards in rural areas.

The research will lead to development of curriculum materials for family physicians in training on medical care related to environment in rural Alabama. Melissa Hutchens, a research associate for the NIH study, will prepare a poster presentation for display at the conference. It will include information on the goals of the study and excerpts of interviews with farmers, physicians, foresters, extension agents, community leaders and other rural Alabamians on the needs in occupational and environmental health.

Hutchens, who has a master's degree in rural sociology, has conducted interviews with rural residents and service providers across the state. She said poor poster excerpts include physicians' horror stories of ingested pesticides, farmers' concerns about immunizing animals, and reports of homes which run sewage onto the ground outside.

**Dr. Gresham Helps with Preadvising and Selection Process**

Dr. Cathy Gresham, CCHS Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine and Director of Medical Student Affairs, is visiting colleges and universities across the state this spring to assist the University of Alabama School of Medicine. Cathy Gresham, M.D. (UASOM) with premed student counseling. She is working with Dr. George Hand, UASOM Assistant Dean for Admissions, and Dr. Bobby Moore, Assistant Dean, UASOM Huntsville program. They are advising premedical students from Samford, Birmingham Southern, Auburn University, The University of Alabama, University of South Alabama, Springfield College, University of North Alabama, UAH and UAB. Their efficient fulltime role those of pre-health advisors on each campus and provide both campus advisors and students with information on UASOM.

**Dr. Marsh Discusses Stroke Care at National Conference**

Dr. Eugene Marsh, neurologist and Assistant Professor in the Clinical Dept. of Psychiatry and Neurology, presented information at a session of the 50th Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Neurology on April 29 in Minneapolis.

His presentation, entitled "Opportunities for Improvement of Care of Medicare Beneficiaries with Acute Ischemic Stroke," summarized results to date of a study he is conducting for the American Academy of Neurology (AAQN) on effective care of stroke patients.

Dr. Marsh chairs the Stroke Project Committee convened and funded by the AAOA, a state agency designated by Alabama's peer review organization by HCFA (Health Care Financing Administration). The Committee is comprised of specialists in areas related to stroke who advise AAOA on the agency's quality improvement project on the care of hospital patients admitted with acute ischemic stroke. Also on the committee are Drs. Frank Gilliam, M.D., internist Laurie Hall, M.D., and epidemiologist John Waterbor, M.D., all of UAB. Dr. Marsh is the Stroke Project Director. He completed a cerebral vascular fellowship at the University of Iowa and serves on the American Heart Association Southeast Affiliate Stroke Task Force.

His presentation included a summary and analysis of data gathered by AAOA from hospital records of 11 volunteer Alabama hospitals regarding stroke care. He reported Eli Lilly and Company will begin third- and fourth-year medical students and three UAB faculty members who were also chosen for membership.

**Dr. Rand Elected to AOAs**

Elizabeth Rand, M.D., Chair of Psychiatry at CCHS, was elected in March to membership in Alpha Omega Alpha, the national medical honor society. She will be inducted on May 6, 1998, along with twenty-seven seniors who plan to attend UAB and who are competing for the ten early admission (to UASOM) spaces available each year. She will also help with the interviews in June for next year's Rural Medical Scholars, a CHCS-based program for outstanding rural students who plan primary care practice in rural areas.

Dr. Gresham has just completed her third year of service on the UA School of Medicine Admissions Committee, and for the past two years she has served on the nine-member Selection Committee which interviews medical school candidates. She also serves on the Early Medical School Acceptance Program Selection Committee for UAB. This year she interviewed high school seniors who plan to attend UAB and who are competing for the ten early admission (to UASOM) spaces available each year. She will also help with the interviews in June for next year's Rural Medical Scholars, a CHCS-based program for outstanding rural students who plan primary care practice in rural areas.

Dr. Gresham, a member of the UASOM Clinical Sciences Subcommittee, and she attends the tri-campus Clerkship Directors meetings in her role as CHCS Director. In January, in Minneapolis, she attended a meeting in Chicago of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Group on Student Affairs.
CCHS Family Practice Residency Fills

CCHS reviewed close to 200 applications and interviewed 66 medical students for positions in the Tuscaloosa Family Practice Residency. "We had our busiest recruiting year in recent memory," said Residency Director Marc Armstrong, M.D., "and we look forward to having thirteen excellent first year residents join the program on July 1."

Incoming residents are Ashley Keri Burchfield, University of Alabama-Huntsville; James Kris City, University of Arkansas; Brad Joseph Gaspard, LSU-New Orleans; Sharon Denise Gray, University of South Alabama; Natasha Michelle Harder, University of Tennessee-Memphis; Tara Haynes, University of Alabama-Tuscaloosa; Bennett Pate Hogan, Mercer University; Bobby Gene Jones, Jr., University Health Sciences, Kansas City, Mo.; Michael Allen Kelley, University of Alabama-Tuscaloosa; Gloria Morgan, Ponce School of Medicine, Puerto Rico; Stephan Alan Roberts, University Health Sciences, Kansas City, Mo.; Gerard Sztyber, American University of the Caribbean; and James E. Wallace, Jr., University of Alabama-Tuscaloosa.

Match Day Reveals Next Step for Medical Students

CCHS senior medical students learned their residency training assignments on March 18, which was national "Match Day." Medical students across the country were computer-matched to residency programs based on their choices and input from the programs after the applications/interview process.

Five Tuscaloosa seniors chose family medicine for specialty training, and two -- Tara Haynes and Jim Wallace -- will remain here to enter the three-year Family Practice Residency. Three CCHS seniors will enter internal medicine residencies, three are enrolling in pediatrics training, and four are headed to OB/GYN residencies. Three students chose emergency medicine training, and two will train in surgery. Other specialties chosen by CCHS seniors are urology, radiology, orthopedics, and pathology.

Dr. Wilmer Coggins, CCHS Dean Emeritus, who attended the Match Day luncheon with students and faculty in Tuscaloosa, said he was proud of the match results. "Our students matched to some prestigious residency programs," he said, "and I think that speaks well of the preparation and training they receive at CCHS."

UASOM Medical Students Choose CCHS Training

As "Match Day" passes and senior medical students look forward to their residency training programs, CCHS prepares to welcome rising third year medical students from the Birmingham campus of UASOM who will receive clinical training here during their last two years of medical school. "Twenty-three students have chosen CCHS as their home base for clinical clerkships," said Dr. Cathy Gresham, CCHS Director of Medical Student Affairs. "In addition, a number of Birmingham-based students will do one or more clerkships here, predominantly in surgery and a few in family/fourth medicine, psychiatry/neurology, and OB/GYN. I think they choose to train here because they know they get more "hands on" experience and one-to-one time with faculty."

Medical students entering their fourth year are using a new tri-campus computer program to schedule courses. They have 16 weeks of required coursework and 16 weeks of electives to complete. With the help of volunteer faculty advisors, students choose the courses that they need and enter their choices on FYSH (Fourth Year Scheduling Helper). Students choose their own advisors from faculty who consent to serve in this capacity, said Dr. Gresham.
Medical Students See Their Own Patients in "We Care" at Capstone

Medical students get a chance to take care of their own patients during their first year at CCHS. "We Care" at Capstone Medical Center is a continuity clinic in which third year medical students follow their patients and have regularly assigned clinic times, one half day every 7-8 days. The students also learn about patients besides their own when they and their classmates share case presentations at monthly meetings, said Dr. Bobbi Adcock, Director of Predoctoral Education in Family Medicine.

Dr. Adcock and other Family Medicine faculty rotate in the role of attending physician for the clinic, which operates each weekday afternoon. "It gives the Family Medicine faculty a chance to get to know and interact with the medical students in their first year here," she said.

MS III's Get Unique Hands On Experience

Dr. Robert Centor, Interim Dean, initiated the idea for the continuity clinic when he came to CCHS and envisioned the clinic here as a pilot for the other two UASOM campuses, said Dr. Adcock. She volunteered to direct the clinic because she enjoys working with students. "Medical students are eager to learn, and it is stimulating to share in their first exposure to family medicine," she said.

"Sometimes students get to follow patients they meet at the ER or in labor and delivery. For example, Tammy Watkins, one of our students, is now following a baby she delivered on her OB rotation. The family did not have its own physician, and she could offer follow-up care here."

Tonya Bradley, MS III, says the best thing about We Care is "having patients that are ours." She likes getting to know the patient and family, she said. She also appreciates the chance to be with the Family Medicine faculty and see "different ways they practice."

Many of the We Care patients are peds patients, said Dr. Adcock, and it gives our students good experience in providing well care and treating early childhood illnesses. Students also get to see patients of all ages and illnesses when they work in Family Medicine.

Students can also join the Family Medicine Interest Group, organized by Dr. Adcock in 1995, which meets quarterly. Past programs include presentations by practicing family physicians, a suturing workshop, and interviewing for a residency program, with "how-to" and "how-not-to," demonstrations by Dr. Angela Powell and Dr. Davis Woodward.

For more information on We Care or the Family Medicine Interest Group at CCHS, call Dr. Adcock at Capstone Medical Center, 205/348-2880.

Medical student Grant Eudy examines We Care patient Shannon Snell. He said he had talked to students who had enjoyed their We Care experiences last year and that having an opportunity to see patients in this clinic was one of the reasons he chose the Tuscaloosa campus for his third and fourth years of medical school.

Medical student Cheryl Hill and attending physician Marc Armstrong review a chart on her patient at "We Care," a continuity clinic conducted by third year students at CMC. Students get to follow their own family practice patients.