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The Colorado Rural Health Center Responds to the Impact of the ACA and the Role of Allied Health in Colorado

With the anticipated increase of Americans accessing healthcare, allied health professionals are an integral part of the comprehensive healthcare team. As the nation celebrates National Allied Health Professions Week, the Colorado Rural Health Center begins recruiting allied health professionals into rural Colorado.

Denver, CO – It is estimated that 7.8 million uninsured rural Americans under the age of 65 will have access to health coverage under the Affordable Care Act. “With the huge influx of anticipated newly covered patients accessing care, the rural healthcare workforce will be utilized as never before,” said Michelle Mills, Chief Executive Officer at CRHC.

For this reason, strengthening the healthcare workforce was addressed in the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Workforce provisions outlined included, increasing the number of primary care physicians and nurses, strengthening the dental health workforce, creating education and training programs, and expanding teaching health centers.

“Although Medicaid expansion will bring coverage to thousands of rural citizens, the workforce is not sufficiently developed to provide equitable access,” says Mills. Most rural communities experience provider shortages and a current workforce that is nearing retirement.

For example, although 20 percent of the US population lives in rural communities, only 9 percent of physicians practice there.

To address the rural healthcare workforce shortage, the Colorado Rural Health Center is expanding its provider recruitment to include allied health professionals. Constituting approximately 60 percent of all healthcare providers, allied health practitioners greatly influence healthcare delivery by supporting, facilitating, and complementing the roles of physicians and other healthcare specialists. This collaboration, which emphasizes the strengths of all health professions, is enhancing the quality of care in this country.

Because allied health professionals have been shown to directly impact the cost and quality of care, CRHC recently hired an additional recruitment coordinator to specifically recruit allied health professionals needed in rural Colorado. Allied health professionals represent multiple disciplines of healthcare professionals ranging from speech therapists to nursing staff who provide care in a range of settings including, hospitals, clinics, schools, long-term care facilities, home health agencies, laboratories, pharmacies and rehabilitation centers.

“Fulfilling the demand for allied health professionals will be crucial to meet the future demands for Colorado’s healthcare needs,” says Mills.

An aging healthcare workforce and population, combined with healthcare reform, will increase demand for many healthcare professionals and expand the roles and scope of practice for existing professionals.

“Small rural clinics do not have the extensive staff that hospitals and urban facilities employ,” added Mills. Allied health professionals are a crucial part of the rural health delivery system and remain a cost effective approach to ensuring a patient’s overall health – especially as access, delivery and workforce development issues continue to be addressed with the implementation of healthcare reform.

CRHC’s rollout of allied health recruitment coincides with Allied Health Professions Week, celebrated nationally November 3 through 9, as a time to honor healthcare providers working in the more than 80 allied health professions. CRHC encourages you

to take this opportunity to congratulate all allied health professionals in your community who are instrumental in maintaining your high standard of healthcare and responding to your healthcare needs.

In addition to recruiting allied health professionals, CRHC will begin recruitment of skilled nursing personnel. CRHC's workforce department is a full service recruitment program that places health professionals in rural and underserved areas, provides recruitment and retention training for communities and facilities, loan repayment navigation, community development, and convening of statewide consortiums.

The program officially operates as Colorado Provider Recruitment (CPR), established in 2001, with long-standing relationships with Colorado hospitals and clinics. For more information about the program, questions about allied health professionals or to speak with a recruiter about posting your current opportunities in rural Colorado, email cpr@coruralhealth.org.

About The Colorado Rural Health Center

The Colorado Rural Health Center was established in 1991 as Colorado's State Office of Rural Health. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, CRHC's serves dual roles as the State Office of Rural Health with the mission of assisting rural communities in addressing healthcare issues; and as the State Rural Health Association, advocating for policy change to ensure that rural Coloradoans have access to comprehensive, affordable healthcare services of the highest quality. For more information visit www.coruralhealth.org, call 303-832-7493, or call toll free 800-851-6782 from rural Colorado.

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