



Health care branching  
out  
to rural  
communities



Connecticut State Office of Rural Health

**Connecticut Office of Rural Health  
Northwestern Connecticut Community College  
4 Park Place East  
Winsted, CT 06098**

**2009  
Annual Report**

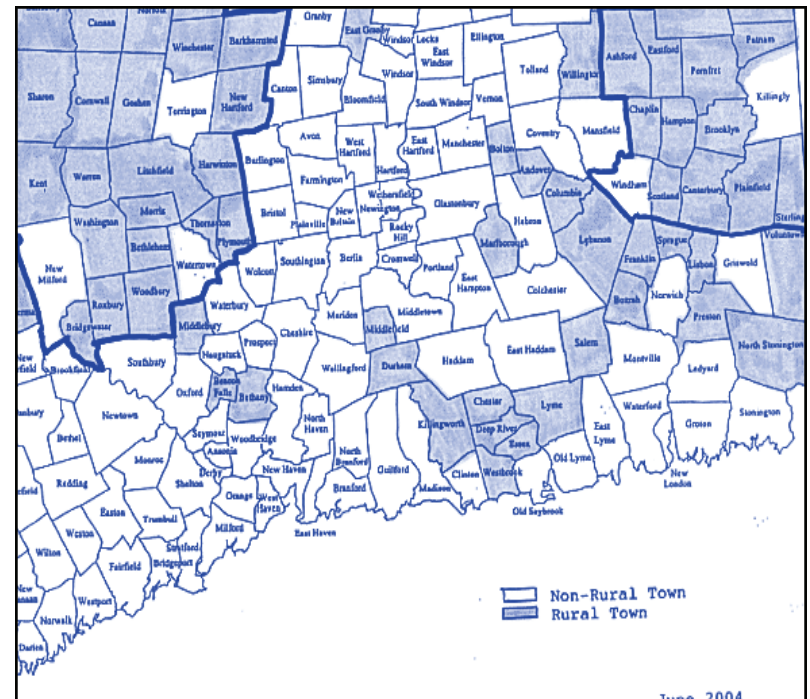
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## GREETINGS FROM THE DIRECTOR

This past 2008-09 grant year has been a very busy one for the Connecticut Office of Rural Health (CT-ORH). To showcase some of the activities we have undertaken, we are publishing our first annual report. The annual report format will replace the periodic newsletter that we previously published and distributed. I hope you will enjoy reading about four specific programs that took place to help enhance the quality of care for rural Connecticut residents. Articles about each of these programs follow in this first annual report.

Besides funding the four highlighted programs, the CT-ORH had the opportunity to work on several issues around hospice services in rural CT. The office conducted a feasibility study to determine the need and resources needed to develop a regional hospice volunteer training program to assist three hospice service organizations. The office also provided grant-writing assistance to an organization applying for federal funds to enhance rural hospice care to veterans and thirdly, was host to a regional post-traumatic stress disorder training program for health care providers and hospice volunteers.

We were pleased to assist the Winsted Health Center Foundation in bringing a pilot oral health screening and education program to some classes in the Winsted school system.

Through our activities, the Connecticut Office of Rural Health strives to:

Provide information and educate both community residents and health care provider groups on rural health issues and health-related opportunities

Strengthen and assist in the creation of partnerships that encourage collaboration in health care and in the use of limited resources

Provide technical assistance through actions such as grant-writing assistance, research and identification of data resources, facilitation of meetings and partnership formation and by conducting research and feasibility studies

Our office continues to be a voice for rural health care in the state, New England and nationally. We look forward to serving you during this next 2009-10 year.

Sincerely,



## CT OFFICE OF RURAL HEALTH MISSION STATEMENT:

*Working together to promote the health of persons living in rural Connecticut through education, communication and partnership, focusing on the enhancement, access and promotion of quality healthcare for rural Connecticut.*

## CORE FUNCTIONS:

- To assist in the coordination and dissemination of information, resources and activities that promote rural health on a regional or statewide basis
- To provide technical assistance to rural health providers and organizations
- To enhance recruitment and retention efforts for rural health care providers
- To promote state, local, regional and federal partnerships

Projects and initiatives from the CT Office of Rural Health (CT-ORH) are funded through the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy grant program, CFDA # 93.913, from the Health Resources & Services Administration. The grant CFDA 93.913 is awarded to Northwestern CT Community College (NCCC) to maintain the CT-ORH. Projects must be consistent with the CT-ORH's mission to support the planning, enhancement, education or evaluation of programs.

NCCC: Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action/M/F Institution

## LIVE LONG, LIVE WELL

### EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE INITIATIVES

In collaboration with the New England Council for EMS Inc., (NECEMS), the CT Office of Rural Health provided funding for two rural EMS organizations to sponsor EMS Management and Leadership education and training sessions. The EMS Management and Leadership Training Program is an eight- module, 40-hour training program developed in response to a need identified by the NECEMS membership. The training sessions cover topics that address a variety of skill sets that enhance and foster successful EMS management and leadership. Module program instructors have expertise in particular program areas and come from the six New England states.

Module 1, *An Introduction to EMS Management*, was held in March at the EMS Institute in Sharon, CT. Twenty-six people attended representing 12 rural EMS organizations. The second module, *Human Resources* was held in April at Quinebaug Valley Community College and was sponsored by KB Ambulance of Danielson, CT. Representatives from six rural EMS provider organizations attended this training session. The program evaluations favorably indicated a need and great interest in offering these modules again along with the remaining modules.

While the first two training modules were face to face encounters with instructors, the remaining modules are developed to be offered as hybrid courses, meaning some of them will be face-to-face and other parts can be taken on-line back in local EMS facilities or in their private homes.

The CT Office of Rural Health plans to continue to provide funding to be used in offering the next modules of this management program for the rural EMS provider groups. For more information, contact the CT Office of Rural Health.

Pomperaug Health District received a 2008-09 State Office of Rural Health grant to design, implement and evaluate a community elder mental health program. The Pomperaug Health District partnered with the Newtown Health District for this initiative. The project, *Live Long, Live Well* served the residents in the rural towns of Woodbury, Oxford, Bridgewater and Roxbury, CT.

Through this grant program, the Health District developed a two-pronged program regarding elder mental health and the concern of depression for some elderly. The grant program consisted of developing an educational program for both the community and local health care providers and elder service groups and secondly, to develop a community screening program for elder residents.

Extensive community informational programming was provided at each senior center. The sessions included a mental health based “feel good bingo game”. The project utilized several community outreach methods, including a library poster board presentation and nighttime informational seminars. These seminars were not well-attended. It may be that the low attendance was in part due to the “stigma” that surrounds mental health issues, especially in older populations. If the program is to be held again, the reasons for low attendance would need to be evaluated further. The health care providers’ and senior service agencies’ education component was developed and implemented. A provider breakfast, was designed to reach out to agencies and professionals working with the older population. The breakfast was well-attended by professionals including senior center directors, agency directors and visiting nurses.

The screening program was available at the senior centers and through homebound intervention. The 15-point Geriatric Screening Scale questionnaire was utilized with the results evaluated on site by an MSW staff member. Substantial efforts were taken to develop a quality referral list. One barrier that needed to be faced was the difficulty in identifying health care providers accepting Medicare reimbursement for these services and finding providers located closely to these rural towns. Many mental health professionals that serve the older population are located in urban areas and hospital-associated clinics. After extensive work, a list of providers in the greater Danbury and Waterbury areas was generated.

The *Live Long, Live Well* program was generally quite successful and can be duplicated in other areas of the state. If there is interest in this program, please contact the CT Office of Rural Health or the Pomperaug Health District.

## **COMMUNITY BREAST AND CERVICAL HEALTH EDUCATION GRANT**

Uncas Health District (UHD), located in Norwich, Connecticut serves as the full-time local health department to both urban and rural towns, including Bozrah, Sprague, Montville and Norwich. The UHD also provides public health emergency preparedness on a regional level for the rural towns of Franklin, Lebanon, Preston, Salem and Voluntown.

Grant funding from the CT-ORH provided the UHD with the opportunity to expand upon an existing collaborative initiative by providing breast and cervical cancer screening education to women in six rural towns of its service region. Outreach activities were conducted to increase access to health-care for these women which resulted in referral steps to two community health centers as medical homes. Referrals to Backus Hospital were also made for free screening services.

Over 200 women and men participated in seven different breast and cervical health educational programs. The program proved to be successful despite a few challenges such as the limited amount of time available to identify participants, schedule and conduct the educational programs and to obtain funding to sustain the program.

The success of this grant program led to Uncas Health District leveraging additional funds to implement a health status survey for older rural residents for the Eastern CT Rural Health Collaborative. Through partnerships nurtured by the collaborative, the William W. Backus Hospital mobile health van, in a trial program, is traveling into the rural communities to provide a setting for blood pressure screening and referral for medical and social services.

For more information on these programs, contact the CT Office of Rural Health or the Uncas Health District.

## **HOSPICE CERTIFICATION TRAINING GRANT**

Foothills Visiting Nurse & Home Care, Inc. in Winsted, CT was another of the CT Office of Rural Health 2008-09 award grantees. This organization developed a Hospice and Palliative Care curriculum and training program to prepare identified staff members, including Registered Nurses, Licensed Practical Nurses and Home Health Aides, to sit for the National Hospice and Palliative Care Certification examinations. The coursework consisted of eight two-hour study sessions with licensed staff in one group and non-licensed staff in another group. After completing the training, all of the participants successfully passed their national examinations. The certification is valid for a period of four years. Certification renewal may be done by retesting or by participation in a process which assigns points for continuing education and other professional activities.

All staff members who were involved in the project had a minimum of two years experience working with hospice patients and were interested in gaining a higher level of skill sets to help them when caring for the needs of patients and their families who are facing life-limiting disease and loss.

This certification is providing a direct benefit to Foothills' Hospice and Palliative Care patients through the staff's increased expertise in all aspects of hospice care with a special emphasis on the areas of pain and symptom management. These newly certified trained professionals are sharing their new knowledge with other nurses and care providers working in the hospice and palliative care field.

The training curriculum and teaching schedule is easily duplicated and can be shared with others. Please contact the CT Office of Rural Health for more information.