

Mark your
Calendar!



The Branch

An Update for State Offices of Rural Health and our Partners

December 2011

Website: www.nosorh.org Wikispaces: nosorh.wikispaces.com



December 1

Joint Committee on Rural
Emergency Care (3:00 p.m.
EST)

December 5

Policy Program Monitoring
Team (3:00 p.m. EST)

December 6

RHC TA Team (2:00 p.m. EST)

December 7

New Board Member/
Committee Chair Orientation
(1:30 p.m. EST)

December 8

Webinar: *National Rural
Health Day Celebration Recap*
(2:00 p.m. EST)

December 14-15

NOSORH Board Planning
Meeting

December 20

Policy Committee (2:00 p.m.
EST)

December 21

Communications Committee
(3:00 p.m. EST)

December 22

FLEX Committee (3:00 p.m.
EST)

January 2

Policy Program Monitoring
Team (3:00 p.m. EST)

January 11

Webinar: *Preparing for the
NRHA Policy Institute* (2:00
p.m. EST)

January 29 (tentative)

NOSORH Membership
Meeting (@ NRHA Policy
Institute, Washington, DC;
6:00 p.m. EST)

Please visit our [News &
Events](#) section to learn
about these and addition-
al upcoming events.

A "Nontraditional" Holiday Greeting

Dear Members and Partners:

It's been a tradition for at least the past five years that the December Branch include a "year-end" message from the NOSORH President. However, since 2011 has been a year of breaking traditions, breaking new ground and trying new approaches, it's only fitting we break with tradition and send you this message from both of us. Even John's term as President has been somewhat "nontraditional," with his term as interim President-elect starting in July.

We broke new ground in 2011 by introducing a performance measures tool designed specifically to evaluate the impact of State Offices of Rural Health; by forming a Policy Program Monitoring Team to help SORHs understand regulatory changes; and last but not least, by launching our first National Rural Health Day. Looking ahead to 2012, it appears we'll be breaking other traditions as well. For starters, our Board of Directors will conduct its annual strategic planning session in December 2011 rather than January 2012. The Board will expand to 24 members in 2012, and one-third of those members are new – a conscious effort to establish a more diverse representation of SORHs. We also plan on relying less on our volunteers and more on our staff in 2012, and we've made some tough policy choices as well – including not asking for an increase in funding for rural programs. We believe these groundbreaking steps will increase the value of services we offer to SORHs and their partners.

We thank everyone for your work to improve rural health, and we welcome your input on what NOSORH can do to meet your needs in 2012 and beyond. Best wishes for a happy holiday season and great success in the New Year!

Sincerely,

John Barnas
NOSORH President

Teryl Eisinger
NOSORH Director



Jessica Burkard Joins NOSORH Staff



NOSORH is pleased to welcome technology/social media experience to **Jessica Burkard** as its special projects coordinator as of December 5. Jessica will help guide SORHs' involvement in the Partnership for Patients Initiative, support SORHs' leadership development efforts and assist efforts to expand their partnership and technical assistance capacity.

Jessica, who was born and raised in Tokyo before moving to rural Washington State, brings a diverse array of health care, project management and

quality improvement efforts and other educational/technical assistance needs. "I'm excited to become part of the team and (contribute to) the incredible work of NOSORH," Jessica says. She is also "dedicated to improving access, delivery and the cost of care in rural America."

Welcome aboard, Jessica!

Our Sincere Thanks ...

...to **Gerald Ackerman** (Nevada, Region D Representative), **Denny Berens** (Nebraska, Community Leaders Co-liasion), and **Patsy Whaley** (Georgia, Educational Exchange Committee chair), who are stepping down from their NOSORH volunteer leadership positions at the end of the year. We certainly appreciate your contributions to NOSORH and your willingness to serve!

Thank you also to three Board members who will be wearing different hats next year:

- **Heather Reed** (Ohio) and **Pat Carr** (Alaska), who step aside as Region C and Region E representatives, respectively, but remain on the Program Policy Monitoring Team; and
- **Mark Schoenbaum** (Minnesota), who steps aside as Past President but remains co-chair of the Policy Committee.

Be sure to check out next month's *Branch* for a compilation of NOSORH's incoming Board members and 2011 committee chairs and co-chairs.

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No "Super Committee" Recommendations; What's Next?

As you know, the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction (the "super committee") did not reach a deal on reducing the deficit by its legislated deadline. As a result, across-the-board cuts to federal programs are now slated to occur through a mandated sequestration process.

What short- and long-term impacts will this have on rural health? That and other questions were discussed by NOSORH leaders earlier this week.

What is the sequestration process? Simply put, sequestration translates into across-the-board cuts of \$120 billion per year split evenly between defense and non-defense programs. S-CHIP, veterans' programs and some other programs are protected from these cuts, but cuts to other programs are all on the table – including 2% cuts in Medicare reimbursements to *all* providers. Congress could send a bill to the president that would accomplish cuts to the budget by other means

What will the impact be on rural appropriations? Because the sequestration process isn't scheduled to take effect until January 2013,

appropriations and entitlement programs won't be affected during the current fiscal year. The appropriations process for the next fiscal year will remain the same – the Appropriations Committee will be given a "top number," and it can then recommend level funding, zero out funding or recommend increased funding to line items as they do every year. The difference, however, will be in the "top number" being considered for budgeted line items, which will most likely be less. Some estimate that budgeted amounts for health and human services will likely be reduced by 8%.

What about some of the previously proposed changes to rural health funding, such as reducing critical access hospital (CAH) Medicare reimbursements to 100%, eliminating CAH reimbursement to hospitals within 10-15 miles of another hospital, and other proposed cuts? Changes such as these cannot just be made administratively; however, it's still possible these changes could be proposed in any legislation to reduce

the deficit and avoid sequestration.

Despite all of your outstanding work reaching out to legislators to date, our work is not done – with Congress returning to work in mid-January and beginning work on appropriations in the spring, our outreach efforts need to continue. Between now and then, we'd like to hear what you think about the following questions:

- How do you think CAHs will most likely implement any budget cuts?
- Will this affect their hours of operation or force them to reduce services?
- Would a 2% reduction to all providers result in a loss of jobs or services?

Keep your ear to the ground and share with us anything you hear from your hospitals. Help keep the Policy Committee informed so we can continue shaping short- and long-term strategies for protecting the rural health safety net. Also feel free to email your thoughts about the proposed cuts to [Bill Finerfrock](mailto:Bill.Finerfrock).

Hope to See You in Washington

As in years past, NOSORH will hold a **Membership Meeting** in conjunction with the upcoming [National Rural Health Association Policy Institute](#). That meeting is tentatively scheduled to take place at **6:00 p.m. EST on Sunday, January 29** at a location to be determined within the Capitol Hilton. Stay tuned for more details about the membership meeting and a January webinar designed to help members prepare for their Hill visits.

"Straight from the SORHs": News from the State Offices and ORHP



NOSORH congratulates [Sandi Durick](#), director of the South Dakota Office of Rural Health, on being elected president-elect of the National Rural Health Association (NRHA). Her selection marks the third time in four years that a SORH director has been chosen to lead the organization – Denny Berens (Nebraska) was elected president-elect in 2008 and Kris Sparks (Washington) was elected in 2009.

Sandi will serve one year as president-elect before becoming NRHA's leader in 2013.

NOSORH was saddened to learn of the death of longtime rural health advocate **Frank Newman** on November 11. Frank made several notable contributions during a distinguished 40-year career. He was one of the founders and became director of the Montana State University branch of the University of Washington Medical School Regional Medical Education Program (known today as the WWAMI Program); he also served as the first director of the Montana Office of Rural Health. [Click here](#) to read more about Frank's distinguished life and career.

[Jane Schadle](#) has rejoined the Iowa Bureau of Oral and Health Delivery Systems as executive officer of the Iowa Flex Program. Jane, a past president of the Iowa Rural Health Association,

helped launch Iowa's Flex Program in 1998 during her previous tenure with the Bureau. Welcome back, Jane!

NOSORH staff members have been appointed to several volunteer leadership positions the past few months – [Teryl Eisinger](#) was appointed to the Technical Assistance and Services Center's Advisory Committee and the Rural Assistance Center's Advisory Board, and [Stephanie Hansen](#) was elected to the Idaho Rural Health Association Board of Directors.

Please contact [Bill Hessert](#) with any staffing changes, awards or other news about you or your SORH. Also, please let [Stephanie Hansen](#) know when any new employees join your staff so we can welcome them and share information about NOSORH's educational exchange opportunities.

Educational Exchanges – Available for You!

Planning to implement a new or expand an existing a new program/activity? Hoping to benefit from the expertise of another SORH that has implemented a similar program/activity? Looking to provide unique leadership/professional development opportunities for members of your staff? Then the NOSORH Educational Exchange Program is just for you!

Jo Johnson, recruitment services coordinator for the Oregon Office of Rural Health, used a NOSORH travel scholarship to learn about the Wyoming Office of Rural Health's recruitment and retention efforts and attend a recruitment and retention workshop offered by the Wyoming Health Resources Network. According to Jo, the visit gave

provided a fresh perspective on the importance of community involvement in the entire recruitment and retention process.

"The younger people within the Wyoming Health Resources Network shared their knowledge and enthusiasm about current trends in communication and technology, while the more experienced members had historical knowledge that provided a firm foundation for Wyoming's successful recruitment and retention efforts," Jo says. "I came away from the experience excited to be doing what I'm doing and excited to share new stories of efforts in and success from another state."

As for the NOSORH Educational Exchange Program, Jo says that "Everyone should find a program you

admire or someone whose innovativeness inspires you and take advantage of this opportunity for personal and professional growth."

The NOSORH Education Exchange Program can benefit your SORH as well! Visit the [Educational Exchange](#) section of the NOSORH website to obtain a listing of mentors/peers by state or area of expertise. You can also complete and submit an [Educational Exchange Application](#) for funding to support your experience. The application process is easy, and the Educational Exchange Committee will review your application quickly. Feel free to contact NOSORH Education Coordinator [Stephanie Hansen](#) to learn more.

National Rural Health Day – We Did It!

We shared some great statistics with everyone via email last week that highlighted the success of our inaugural National Rural Health Day in terms of gubernatorial proclamations, media coverage and social media mentions. But the most important number to us is **100%**, which represents the participation rate of SORHs in National Rural Health Day. That's right – every SORH either planned some sort of event/activity to observe National Rural Health Day or helped others within their state celebrate the occasion! So thank you for embracing the inaugural National Rural Health Day and making it such an overwhelming success!

Thanks also to our partners who really stepped

up on National Rural Health Day - especially those who conducted webinars on November 17. If you were busy celebrating in your state and couldn't attend any of the webinars, all of the presentations are now posted in the [Resources](#) section on the National Rural Health Day website; [click here](#) to download any or all of the presentations.

Needless to say, we're looking forward to "Celebrating the Power of Rural" in 2012 and beyond – and we're interested in knowing how we can make future celebrations even bigger and better. There are two ways for you to provide feedback: by completing the [National Rural Health Day survey](#) that you were recently asked

to complete by December 7; and attending the *National Rural Health Day Celebration Recap* webinar tentatively scheduled for 2:00 p.m. EST on Thursday, December 8. Stay tuned for call-in information and additional details about the webinar – and feel free to invite your National Rural Health Day partners to complete the survey or attend the webinar as well!



Policy Program Monitoring Team Preparing Comments on Hospital Reform Rules

The Policy Program Monitoring Team is in the process of preparing comments on the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services' proposed rules on the Reform of Hospital and Critical Access Hospital Conditions of Participation. Comments must be submitted by December 23.

A PowerPoint presentation highlighting these proposed changes can be found under the Policy Documents subheading in the [Policy/Other Documents](#) section of the NOSORH website. Our thanks to Harvey Licht for providing this overview!

Comings and Goings



It's time to once again say "good-bye" and "good luck" to two of our colleagues.

[Val Schott](#) has stepped down as director of the **Oklahoma Office of Rural Health** and director of rural health policy and advocacy for the Oklahoma State University Center for Rural Health to become chief executive officer of the Oklahoma Health

Insurance Exchange Trust. Val's contributions to rural health have been enormous, including stints as president of NOSORH and the National Rural Health Association.

Meanwhile, [Karen Welle](#) has resigned as assistant director of the **Minnesota Office of Rural Health and Primary Care** (ORHPC) to become assistant director of the Health Policy Division of the Minnesota Department of Health (ORHPC's organizational home). "It has been a highlight of my time in ORHPC to participate in all things NOSORH and especially the Communications Committee," Karen says. "Teryl and crew have come in and done such amazing work in supporting the organization – I will miss seeing all of you and keeping in touch by phone."

Best of luck in your new roles, Val and Karen – you will be truly missed!

In light of Val's departure, [Corie Kaiser](#) has been named interim director of the Oklahoma Office of Rural Health. Corie is certainly no stranger to NOSORH and currently serves as a Region D Representative on the NOSORH Board. Congratulations and good luck in your new role, Corie!

Also, even though she has been serving in her new role since August and attended the NOSORH Annual Meeting in September, NOSORH would like to "officially" introduce [Heather Cappabianca](#), as director of the **Connecticut State Office of Rural Health**. Heather has accumulated a wealth of administrative healthcare experience working with nursing homes in rural areas. For the past eight years, she has served as coordinator of non-credit health programs at Northwestern Connecticut Community College. Welcome to the NOSORH family, Heather!