

Ask a Leader – Lisa Davis (December 2013)

Lisa Davis joined the Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health (PORH) in 1994 as its first full-time staff person. After a two-year hiatus, she came back to PORH in 1999 to serve as the director, a position she still holds. She is co-chair of the NOSORH Policy Committee, serves on the Awards Committee and was an inaugural member of the Educational Exchange Committee.

What do you like most about being a SORH director?

Acting as an advocate has always been an important thing for me. Right out of college, I worked in a residential program for schizophrenics and also volunteered for 15 years or so in the county prison. So, trying to address the needs of vulnerable populations is a priority for me. When I came to work for the state office, I met this amazing network of people in the state and across the country. I had never imagined there was a group so smart and so dedicated to what they were doing--and so fun. It was like finding this family that I hadn't known was out there.

What skills do you think a SORH director needs?

Having a firm understanding of the issues--a good framework about rural populations. Having good interpersonal skills. Having vision for what you think should and could happen. And knowing what you know--and what you don't know. There are so many tremendous resources out there. At any given time, I have 50 or so people I can call, either in the state or SORHs and other rural contacts across the country, or others I've worked with. And I hope that I am a source of information for new folks coming up through the ranks. But I do have to say that there are many days when I realize that even with all the experience I have, there are others out there who know a lot more than I do. I'm always impressed when I get other peoples' perspectives on things.

What are your goals for PORH next year?

* To continue to increase our relevance in rural health efforts in Pennsylvania. We are getting mini-grants out to communities, which is one way that we can help provide support for local projects.

* To establish a statewide rural health branding and marketing campaign to highlight why strong rural healthcare delivery systems matter. We'll be presenting plaques with a logo we've had designed, which promotes rural health as high quality health close to home. [See design, below right]. We'll be holding events at rural hospitals, rural health clinics, and other community-based providers, presenting the plaques to recognize them as quality rural health providers. This way we can help build awareness that rural health is unique--and special.

* And, to continue to increase and diversify our funding, using ideas from our great Educational Exchange program with Graham Adams this year.