

Mark your Calendar!



The Branch

An Update for State Offices of Rural Health and our Partners

January 2013

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January 4

- Deadline for comments on [Methodology for Designation of Frontier and Remote Area](#)

January 15

- Policy Committee (2 pm EST)

January 22

- Communications Committee (1 pm EST)
- Learning Community: Rural Workforce Issues (3pm EST)

January 24

- Webinar: Preparing for the NRHA Policy Institute (2 pm EST)
- Flex Committee (3 pm EST)

January 29

- Education Exchange Committee (1 pm EST)
- Webinar: Introduction to the Obesity Prevention Evidence-Based Toolkit (3pm EST)

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

New Year's Greeting from President Scott Ekblad

I begin my term as NOSORH President as the changes mandated by the Affordable Care Act continue to unfold. Those changes are desperately needed by many, and rural Americans have every right to benefit from them. That will be my focus during my term as NOSORH President.

It won't be easy to transition from our current system of incentivizing more office visits and more procedures to one of keeping people healthy and out of the hospital. SORHs will be there to help their rural communities navigate this fundamental shift and achieve the triple aim of health care reform: better health, better quality and lower cost. NOSORH will spend 2013 making sure you have the tools to do exactly that.

NOSORH is very good at what it does, which is to help your office be more effective, and you to be a better public servant. NOSORH is your organization. If you aren't already, please consider becoming involved with NOSORH this year. Participate in a webinar. Enroll in one of our leadership development activities. Volunteer to serve on a committee. Or maybe just respond to a NOSORH survey. Your involvement makes NOSORH a better organization, and we welcome your input at every level.

Please join me in thanking John Barnas for his service as the longest serving single-term President of NOSORH. He was President-Elect in 2011 when a career change forced then-President Caroline Ford to resign. John stepped in to fill the rest of her term, then went on to serve his own one-year term. He has been a beacon to the board and staff for a year and a half, providing guidance and clarity during a time when the national spotlight was being shone on health care in this country. Thank you, John, from your NOSORH family.

It is my honor to serve as your president in 2013. May the New Year bring health, happiness and success to you and to your slice of rural America.

Sincerely,



Policy Update: Lame Ducks and Fiscal Cliffs

While the lame duck 112th Congress took the necessary steps to permanently address the tax portion of the "fiscal cliff" and temporarily address some of the pending Medicare payment reductions, they postponed action on sequestration and spending.

Much of the public attention on Medicare was focused on the enactment of a one-year SGR "fix" (Congress postponed the 26.5 percent cut and authorized a one-year freeze in the conversion factor), but there were other important Medicare fixes in the bill sent to the President.

These include: extending the existing 1.0 **Work Geographic Adjustment floor** through December 31, 2013 (which will prevent Medicare payment reductions for many rural physicians); extending the **therapy cap exception process** through December 31, 2013; extending the **add-on payment for**

ground ambulance services, including services provided in "super rural" areas, through December 31, 2013; extending the **Medicare inpatient hospital payment adjustment for low volume hospitals** until December 31, 2013; and extending the **Medicare-Dependent hospital (MDH) program** until October 1, 2013.

(For a more complete list of Medicare Provider Payment provisions extensions and health provision offsets, click [here](#)).

In addition to these Medicare changes, we were supposed to experience across-the-board spending reductions (aka sequestration) in most federal programs as part of an effort to rein in federal spending. With this in mind NOSORH emailed a letter urging the members of the House Rural Coalition and the Senate Rural Caucus to ensure funding for the important rural

programs like SORH, FLEX, Outreach and Network development were not cut. Congress and the President agreed to delay sequestration for two months to provide additional time to replace the across-the-board cuts with more targeted spending reductions.

It is critically important to recognize that Congress did not rescind sequestration, they merely postponed it. It is highly unlikely that Congress will back down from efforts to reduce long-term spending so budget cuts are still on the horizon—it is just that we don't know where those cuts are going to occur.

Bill Finerfrock
NOSORH Legislative Liaison

2013 NOSORH Annual Meeting Heads to Asheville



Mark your calendars! The NOSORH Annual Meeting will be in Asheville, N.C., on October 28-30, 2013. At this time, we're looking for SORHs to be part of the planning committee for this event. Contact Stephanie Hansen (steph@nosorh.org) if you'd like to help.

Contact Information

Teryl Eisinger
Director
(586) 739-9940
teryle@nosorh.org

Stephanie Hansen
Education Coordinator
(208) 375-0407
steph@nosorh.org

Donna Pfaendtner
Administrative Coordinator
(586) 336-4627
donnap@nosorh.org

Paige Law
Information Assistant
(810) 444-9922
paigel@nosorh.org

For questions, comments or ideas for Branch articles, please contact Beth Blevins, Branch editor at bethb@nosorh.org. For questions about Branch distribution, please contact Paige Law at paigel@nosorh.org.

Your 2013 Board—Ready to Go!



New Board member and Parliamentarian
Kevin Jacobson (WI)



Scott Daniels (HI),
newly elected
Secretary



Gloria Vermie (IA),
newly elected Region
C Representative

The NOSORH 2013 Board of Directors is starting the new year with a Board planning meeting in early January to update NOSORH's strategic plan and to focus on emerging trends, the current needs of SORHs--and NOSORH's role in responding to and meeting those needs, and garnering the best expertise and resources for SORHs. Thanks to all Board members for their contribution of leadership to NOSORH and all the SORHs.

Officers

NOSORH President - Scott Ekblad (OR)
President-Elect - Alisa Druzba (NH)
Secretary (Region D Representative) - Scott Daniels (HI)
Past-President (SOC Chair & EMS Liaison) - John Barnas (MI)
Treasurer & Regional Representative – Charles Owens (GA)
Parliamentarian - Kevin Jacobsen (WI)

Regional Representatives

Region A: Cathleen McElligott (MA) and Kathy Collison (DE)
Region B: Bob Pannell (FL) and Charles Owens (GA)
Region C: Gloria Vermie (IA) and Tina Turner (OH)
Region D: Scott Daniels (HI) and Corie Kaiser (OK)
Region E: Sharla Allen (WY) and Mary Sheridan (ID)

Liaisons

SRHA: Natalie Claiborne
EMS: John Barnas
PPMT: Lynette Dickson and Pat Carr

Ex-Officio Members

Communications: Kylie Nissen and Karen Madden
Education Exchange: Natalie Claiborne and Melinda Merrell
Policy: Lisa Davis and Mark Schoenbaum
Development: Graham Adams
State Office Council Chair: John Barnas
Strategic Planning: Alisa Druzba

2012 By the Numbers – and Congratulations!

It's the time of year when NOSORH staff prepares the end of year report and looks back at workplan activities and outcome measures of our work. We know we can always improve our work and the [Educational Exchange](#) committee, chaired by Melinda Merrell (SC) and Natalie Claiborne (MT), welcomes your input. Some important numbers are up as follows:

- 27% increase in webinar participation this year
- 88% of participants rate face-to-face meetings as excellent - 64% report learning a great deal of new knowledge
- 59% of webinar participants rate webinars excellent - 36% report learning a great deal of new knowledge
- One-to-one mentoring increased, with 16% of SORHs participating in some kind of mentoring experience
- 300 SORHs or their partners participated in learning communities on Partnership for Patients, Tru-Serve and Rural Health Clinic issues

From a quick look at those numbers the Educational Exchange committee has developed a "bucket list" of high interest topics for webinars that will be a priority for the coming year. "We see that the SORHs really value and report better learning at face-to-face meetings, and that our experiment with learning communities seemed to work," according to NOSORH Director Teryl Eisinger. This year NOSORH plans to introduce new learning communities on topics relating to ACA provisions, oral health, workforce and behavioral health.

CONGRATULATIONS and CONTINUED SUCCESS!

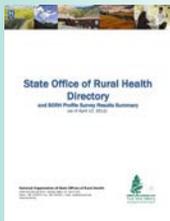
ORHP reports that the Fiscal Year 11 SORH Unobligated Balance decreased by more than 50 percent from Fiscal Year 10!
ORHP reports a more than four-fold increase with SORHs with ZERO carry forward! Congratulations all!

Easy Way to Update Your SORH Profile

It's the New Year and a great time to update your SORH profile. We've tried to make it a little easier:

- First step - Review your current profile online – click on the graphic below to get to the full listing of all SORH profiles
- Second step - Walk through the information you need to provide by clicking [here](#) (for a Survey Monkey page)

OR do it "old school": Print out your current profile, mark it up and fax it to Donna at (586) 336-4629!



January Webinar on Rural Obesity Prevention Toolkit

In an effort to help rural communities address the obesity epidemic, the Rural Assistance Center has launched a [Rural Obesity Prevention Toolkit](#). The toolkit, developed by the [Walsh Center for Rural Health Analysis](#), contains resources to help communities develop obesity prevention programs. NOSORH will host a webinar, Introduction to the Obesity Prevention Evidence-Based Toolkit, on Tuesday, January 29, from 3-4pm. Speakers will include Alana Knudson, PhD, Walsh Center Co-director, and Karen Harris Brewer, MPH, Senior Research Scientist, Public Health Research at NORC. Through the webinar, you will learn about successful models for implementing an obesity prevention program, discuss how your SORH can use the toolkit, and highlight opportunities for disseminating the toolkit to local stakeholders. To register for the webinar, click [here](#). For more information, contact Stephanie Hansen at steph@nosorh.org.

Educational Exchange Helps PA SORH Generate Ideas for Revenue



Lisa Davis [l] and the PA SORH hosted an Educational Exchange with Graham Adams [r] from the SC SORH last month.

Looking to develop new services and products and expand existing initiatives, last month the Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health hosted an Educational Exchange (EE) with Graham Adams of the SC SORH. "For years, I've been hearing Graham come up with ingenious ideas for NOSORH and I wanted to tap into his entrepreneurial way of thinking," said Lisa Davis, Director of the PA SORH. "It was a perfect opportunity." Adams said one reason he did it was because Davis had come to the SC Office and helped them six years ago with their strategic planning.

Davis said that Adams helped identify the resources of her Office and how they match up with the health care needs in rural Pennsylvania. Adams interviewed staff ahead of time by phone, asking them about the strengths of the Office and opportunities for new initiatives. The goal of the retreat was to identify at least six new potential revenue-generating activities, with clear timelines and responsibilities established by the end of the day.

All SORHs must consider opportunities for new funding, especially in times when matching dollars for SORHs are always under threat of state budget cuts. "Since we're at a university, we are considered to be not-for-profit," Davis said. "We need to find ways in which we can increase the amount of discretionary funding we have so that we can continue to serve the state in ways that may not be supported by grant funds."

Adams said he helped the PA SORH think more strategically about their funding portfolio, mainly by asking, "What do your rural providers need?" They came up with three potential answers:

1. What can they offer directly from their staff to rural providers that they can charge for? For example, each state does an Economic Impact Analysis where they work with software that demonstrates health care's effects on the local economy.
2. What can they contract for (could

they contract with someone who can provide a service on their behalf)? For example, a SORH contractor could work with a hospital to help them eliminate waste in their various processes and charge a fee for that service.

3. What can they broker on behalf of rural providers? For example, they could identify a vendor and help forge a contract between a hospital and the vendor. This is an arrangement that associations often have, Adams said.

As a result of the EE, the PA SORH identified a half-dozen potential new programs, such as creating a set of continuing education programs to be done on-site or by webinar that may lead to a certificate, and integrating a rural health track into the existing Penn State online Master in Health Administration program.

Davis noted that revenue-generating activities may work best for a SORH that is part of a university or is a stand-alone entity. "But," asserted NOSORH Director Teryl Eisinger, "all SORHs should consider revenue generating activities as a means to build their capacity to offer more services to rural communities."

The [Educational Exchange Program](#), sponsored by NOSORH, supports leadership and partnership efforts of SORHs by offering and/or facilitating mentoring, education, information exchanges and training assistance. The program paid for all travel expenses for Adams.

Davis recommends the EE program for other SORHs, especially given the fruitful outcome at her Office. "Graham was fantastic—he had never been asked to do this before and he did his homework," she said. "I cannot thank him enough."

Initiative Helps Providers and Patients Support Treatment Decisions

The Federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) recently launched nationwide efforts to promote comparative effectiveness research (CER). CER provides information that helps clinicians and patients work together to treat an illness or condition by comparing drugs, medical devices, tests, surgeries, and ways to deliver

health care. AHRQ is working to cultivate partnerships with hospitals and health systems, patient advocacy organizations, businesses, and other groups that serve clinicians, consumers, and policymakers. You're invited to use and encourage others to use free CER reports and materials, which support efforts to improve the quality of health care in communities.

To learn more about CER, order free materials, access free continuing education modules or to become part of the growing partnership network, visit AHRQ's [Effective Health Care Program](#) web site or contact Jake Yarbrough at 817-920-1834 or jake.yarbrough@ahrq.hhs.gov.

January Steal Sheet

Get your January Steal Sheet—items from this month's Branch that you can "steal" for use in your

newsletters, emails, etc., that are in a downloadable Word file which you can cut and paste as needed. To get

your Steal Sheet, go to the NOSORH Steal Sheets section of the [Toolkits](#) page.