

Healthcare Needs and Challenges Faced by the Rural Community

February 21, 2014

Sara Roberts, MPH

Director, Rural Health

Bureau of Community Health Systems, Kansas Department of Health and Environment

I. Introduction - Why Does Health Care Matter in Rural Communities?

- a. A vigorous and sustainable health care system is essential not only for the health and welfare of the community and its residents.
- b. Health care enhances the community's economy as an employer creating jobs and a purchaser of local goods and services.

Health care employers and employees are important purchasers of goods and services supporting local business establishments. Occupations and employees who work in healthcare are important sources of income in the community supporting services such as housing and construction, retail establishments, restaurants, and other local services. Hospitals and other health care institutes are important purchasers of local inputs, such as laundry services, waste management, and other resources
- c. A strong health care system can help attract and maintain business and industry growth.

Studies have found that the quality of life factors plays a dramatic role in business and industry decisions. Health care services represent some of the most significant quality of life factors. Good health and education services are imperative to industrial and business leaders as they select a community for locations. Employees and participating management may offer strong resistance if they are asked to move into a community with substandard or inconvenient health services. When a business or industry makes a location decision, it wants to ensure that the local labor factor will be productive. A key productive factor = health. Investments in health care can be expected to yield dividends in the form of increased labor productivity. Existence of a strong health care network can lower health care costs for firms and their employees and provide value-added services. [Kansas Rural Health Works Report January 2014]

II. Snapshot of Kansas' Rural Health System

It is important to understand that health care is a multi-facet, system. The delivery of health care services in a rural community is carried by a broad span of providers and organization. Thus, we should recognize there is no one entity fully responsible for delivery health care services to community residents. We can think about a rural health system as care across of a continuum. This continuum begins with maintaining good personal health through public health services and ends with palliative care – services appropriate at the end of life. Key stages within the continuum include emergency and primary care, routine specialist care, inpatient care, rehabilitative services, and long-term care.

While the health-related needs the rural people have similarities, how the health system looks in each rural community is different. The system is design based on the resources

available locally and regionally (i.e., financial, workforce, organizations) as well as the unique characteristics of the community.

- a. Southwest Kansas Rural Example – Haskell County
- b. Southeast Kansas Rural Example – Pottawatomie County

III. *Understanding the Healthcare Issues Facing Rural Communities*

All individuals must have comparable opportunities to obtain services need to ensure good health. The health care system is complex, and public policy should facilitate easy entry and navigation of the system. Rural residents are at particular risk due to the challenge of coordinating care across distance.

While the health care issues facing rural communities are completely different those issues facing metropolitan communities; these challenges are magnified by the population characteristics and geographic attributes of rural communities. Economies of Scale = fewer people and great distances.

If a community wants to maintain the benefits associated with accessible and affordable health care, it must actively works to meet these challenges. The challenges cannot be met by those directly responsible for health care administration alone. They require a community-wide response – government, businesses, and civic leaders. It requires supportive state- and federal-level policies and programs to assist rural communities to response to all of the needs that may exist.

- a. Policy Example – Supporting Rural Clinics and Hospitals
- b. Policy Example – Supporting Rural Health Provider Workforce

IV. *Changing Landscape of Healthcare and Implications for Rural*

- a. Increasing Use of Health Information Technology
- b. Shifting Payment Mind-Frame Emphasizing Value and Performance
- c. New Models of Care Aimed a Integrating Across the Continuum – Population Health
- d. Team-based Delivery of Care Centered Around the Patient - Patient-centered Care

V. *Public Policy's Role in Shaping the Health Care in Rural Kansas*

How our rural health system provides services in our communities have changed over the last 50 years. Our expectations of how our rural health system should perform have transformed. Our health systems must be able to improve:

Service Effectiveness – Improvement in the effectiveness of health services

Service Access – Improvement in access to key health services

Service Efficiency – Reductions in unnecessary utilization of health services;

Health Improvement – Improvement in the health status of the population.

Public policies will have significant impact in the success of rural communities and providers achieving a high performance healthy system leading improving the community well-being.

For example, public policies should support:

- Seamless coordinate services delivered by different providers at different stages of the community care, including the use of telecommunications.
- Strategies that improve communication between local and distance providers,

Draft

- Integrate public health approaches that help realize the vision of health people and places.

Place –based Policy

Policies designed for “places” rather than for “programs” result in complementary, not duplicative programs. Place-based policies strength communities while promoting individual and population health. Place- based policies leverage investments by focusing resources in targeted places and drawing on the compounding effect of well-coordinated action. Effective place-based policies can influence how rural areas develop, how well they function as places to live, work, operate a business, preserve heritage, and more. Properly designed public policies can integrate federal and state programs, and contribute to the prosperity, equity, sustainability, and livability of places. [RUPRI Health Panel Policy Paper, March 2011]