Appalachian State/AccessCare Program Pairing College Interns with Rural Clinics Wins National Rural Health Award

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A PROGRAM THAT PAIRS UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS WITH RURAL CLINICS TO HELP CLINICS IMPROVE PRIMARY CARE SERVICES won the national Innovations in Rural Health Award at an event at Campbell University on Friday. The Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust, one of North Carolina's largest private philanthropies, launched the Rural Health Award in 2013 (news/announcing-2014-innovations-rural-health-award) to recognize innovative rural health work from around the country and plans to explore possibilities for implementing the winning project in the state in the coming year.

"The creative partnership between Appalachian State University and AccessCare of the Blue Ridge to assist rural clinics with a promising new model for providing services exemplifies the type of solutions the Trust is looking for to improve the health of rural North Carolinians," said Allen Smart, vice president of programs at the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust. "All through North Carolina, communities and rural practices are facing similar urgent challenges, and we can learn from the winning program moving forward."

By partnering with Appalachian State University's undergraduate Health Care Management program and rural primary care practices, AccessCare of the Blue Ridge, a local entity of Community Care of North Carolina, discovered an innovative solution for helping practices achieve Patient-Centered Medical Homes (PCMH) recognition, a promising model to improve the delivery of primary care. Appalachian students enrolled in an elective course with academic credit, and some received internship credit, to help rural practices achieve this complicated designation. To date, 16 primary care practices representing over 25,000 patients achieved PCMH recognition, improving clinical outcomes and saving health care dollars. Dozens of students have gained valuable experience through the partnership. Of those who already graduated, some are attending medical school or graduate school, and some are employed in the health care sector.

"We are so honored to be awarded the 2014 Innovations in Rural Health Award," said Laura Himler, practice consultant, AccessCare of the Blue Ridge. "The project was a team effort with our primary care practices and Appalachian State University. It proved to be a win-win for everyone involved as the practices were able to achieve the goals of the project, and the students got excellent hands on management experience. We truly appreciate the cooperation and collaboration of the faculty in the Health Care Management program at Appalachian State and the providers and staff of the primary care offices in our area."

"Appalachian State's College of Health Sciences is proud to be a partner with AccessCare in this innovative program that
exemplifies how public-private partnerships can improve health care for the citizens of rural North Carolina. Our students have benefitted greatly from the experience gained in this program, and they will take that experience with them as they begin their careers in health care," said Dr. Fred Whitt, dean of the College of Health Sciences, home to the Health Care Management program at Appalachian State University.

At the Rural Health Award event, four finalists from around the country presented their innovative ideas about how to tackle entrenched health issues in rural areas to a crowd of more than 100 stakeholders from North Carolina's health care community. Chosen from more than 70 submissions from around the U.S., the finalists' projects included the Appalachian State/AccessCare partnership (https://sites.google.com/site/normhoracz), The Walking Classroom Institute (http://www.thewalkingclassroom.org) in Chapel Hill: a comprehensive program to train childcare workers (http://wellness.unc.edu/Start-Healthy-Start-Now-Grant) about young children's physical and mental well-being in Spokane, Washington; and an Easter Seals program (http://farm.eastersealswisc.org) to keep farmers healthy and working despite age and injury in Wisconsin. The winning organization received a $25,000 prize, and the remaining three finalists each received $7,500 from the Trust for their outstanding work.

Rural Health Award entries were judged on five criteria: 1) ability to address long-standing issues of prevention or treatment, 2) transferability to rural and economically distressed regions of North Carolina, 3) consistent with high-impact work in other rural places, 4) potential for impact within three to five years, and 5) signs of success. A National Review Committee scored the entries and assisted Trust staff in narrowing down the pool to the four finalists honored at Campbell University.

Last year a mobile medication program from rural Pennsylvania (news/mobile-medication-program-mentally-ill-wins-trusts-first-ever-national-rural-health-award) won the Innovations in Rural Health Award. The Trust is working with the North Carolina Hospital Association to implement the program in rural areas of the state in the coming year.

Through its long-time commitment to rural North Carolina and its recent $100 million Healthy Places (content/healthy-places-nc) initiative focused on improving the long-term health of 10 to 15 rural, Tier 1 counties, the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust is leading the way—statewide and nationally—as a thoughtful, strategic funder of rural health work. With the Rural Health Award, the Trust decided to step outside of North Carolina to seek innovative ideas and bring those solutions back to North Carolina’s rural communities.

Read about the four finalists. (sites/default/files/2014%20Rural%20Health%20Award%20finalists_FINAL.pdf)

Category:
News Updates (news/categories/news-updates)
Health care management project wins national award; may become statewide model

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Filed under Awards, Honors and Promotions, General, Health, Today

BOONE—A program that paired undergraduate students from Appalachian State University with rural clinics in Watauga, Ashe and Avery counties, won a $25,000 national award from the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust and may become a model for similar partnerships across the state.

More than three dozen health care management majors from Appalachian’s College of Health Sciences helped rural medical practices in the three-county region improve the quality of their patient care and reduce health care costs through a three-year demonstration project between AccessCare of the Blue Ridge, which is a program of Community Care of North Carolina, and the College of Health Sciences.

During the project, students provided an extra pair of eyes and hands to help the smaller medical practices implement or enhance quality enhancement and cost reduction measures. Such steps help the practices meet National Committee for Quality Assurance criteria for patient-centered medical home (PCHM) designation, according to Associate Professor David Williams in the Department of Nutrition and Health Care Management at Appalachian.

Medical practices that receive PCMH designation qualify for enhanced reimbursement from Medicaid, Medicare, Blue Cross Blue Shield and the N.C. State Health Plan.

“An aim of patient-centered practices is to reduce unnecessary emergency room visits by making a doctor’s office more accessible through expanded office hours, outreach and follow-up visits, especially for pediatric patients or those with chronic diseases,” Associate Professor Susan Roggenkamp explained. Roggenkamp is associate dean of the College of Health Sciences.

To date, more than 18 primary care practices representing more than 26,000 patients in Northwest North Carolina achieved PCMH recognition.

Raleigh native Todd Quartiere, a junior at Appalachian, knows he has already made a difference in the lives of others. So does Casey White of Kernersville who graduates May 10.

Quartiere’s semester-long practicum focused on quality improvement and patient outreach for two medical practices in Ashe County. He worked with office managers to identify and contact patients who were overdue for health screenings and schedule appointments for them. Other students helped practices implement technology to manage patient records and improve efficiency.

http://www.news.appstate.edu/2014/05/06/health-care-management-project/
The experience for the students was invaluable.

"Winning the award was a reminder of how important the work we are doing is," Quartiere said. "The whole class realized we have been doing some great work."

Quartiere said the experience gave him a better perspective into his future career plans, which include working in a hospital setting, physician's office or in medical sales. "I learned a great deal about working in the field by working with the office manager in a physician's practice. I was able to see what's actually going on. It has been an eye opener to see how a physician's office operates and how quickly things can change."

White initially worked to help a health center open in fall 2012, assisting the CEO and COO write policies and procedures. Later, she was an intern supervisor for AccessCare serving as a liaison between the medical practices, students and professors at Appalachian.

"These real life experiences let us know what to expect in health care and provide us with experiences to take to a job interview," White said. "It also has been a great partnership for the medical offices that can be shorthanded," said White who will work for Carolinas HealthCare System as a supervisor in its business office following graduation. "They get the help they need while students get real-world experience working on quality improvement practices."

Williams said, "The fact that these students can show they are familiar with and have implemented NCQA standards, have had exposure to what a physician practice truly is, and that they understand patient flow and the issues of a small rural practice is going to help with employability, both for those who seek employment in a physician practice and also in a health system."

"This innovative program exemplifies how public-private partnerships can improve health care for the citizens of rural North Carolina. Our students have benefitted greatly from the experience gained in this program, and they will take that experience with them as they begin their careers in health care," said Dr. Fred Whitt, dean of the College of Health Sciences.

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