

## HOW TO FIND A POSITION IN A MEDICALLY UNDERSERVED AREA

### *What is a medically underserved area?*

The federal government designates some areas of the country as "medically underserved." These areas, known as health professional shortage areas (HPSAs), have fewer than a generally accepted minimum number of clinicians (physicians, dentists, mental health workers, etc.) per thousand population. Presently, there are some 3,960 designated HPSAs across the U.S. and its territories and approximately 46 million people reside in these areas. Many of them experience limited access to primary care services due to financial, cultural, language, or other barriers. These are the nation's medically underserved.

### *OK, I'm interested in practicing in a medically underserved area, but how do I find a position?*

If you are serious about working in a medically underserved area, there are a number of things you can do to locate a position in Florida:

- Contact the Florida Department of Health Office of Health Professional Recruitment (1-800-342-8660). This office assists in recruiting clinicians for public health departments, community and migrant health centers, and homeless clinics. They also serve as a clearinghouse and keep clinician resumes on file. As vacancies are reported, the office notifies the clinician and refers them to the potential employer.
- Look for state vacancies with the Department of Health, Department of Corrections, and Department of Children & Families on the following web site: <http://fcn.state.fl.us>. Scroll down to Showcase Applications, then click on Jobs Direct.
- Contact the Florida Association of Community Health Centers (FACHC) (1-800-456-8263). FACHC is an organization comprised of the state's 27 community/migrant and homeless health centers. This office is aware of many of the positions in clinic sites around the state. In addition, they can send you a list of all of the community/ migrant and homeless health centers in Florida for you to contact individually. Or you can search for open positions by connecting to their web site: <http://www.fachc.org>. Scroll down to Job Opportunities and you will be linked to the Florida AHEC Network Health Careers Employment Database.
- Contact your local Area Health Education Center (AHEC). AHECs have a common objective of recruiting and retaining health care providers in medically underserved areas. Florida has 10 community-based AHECs covering all of the state's 67 counties. Because AHEC staff work closely with underserved sites around the state, they are often familiar with job openings within the counties they serve. The names and phone numbers of Florida's 10 AHECs, and the counties they serve, are listed on the last page.
- Contact the Florida AHEC Network Health Careers Recruitment Database via its web site: <http://floridahealthjobs.org> or <http://flahec.org/recruitment>. As a job seeker, you can search the database for jobs and find out information about the organizations posting the jobs. You can also enter a profile of information about yourself for job recruiters to contact you.

### **Are there any incentives available to me for working in a medically underserved area?**

Primary health care clinicians who choose to serve in medically underserved areas of Florida may be eligible for federal or state loan repayment programs in addition to a competitive salary and benefits package.

- If you are a physician (MD or DO) with a specialty in family medicine, general pediatrics, general internal medicine, general psychiatry, or obstetrics/gynecology, or a primary care nurse practitioner or physician assistant, certified nurse midwife, dentist, dental hygienist, clinical psychologist, clinical social worker, psychiatric nurse specialist, or marriage and family therapist, and if you are a U.S. citizen with a valid, unrestricted license to practice in Florida, and agree to practice in a priority HPSA for a minimum of two years, you may be eligible for the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) Loan Repayment Program. This program will repay qualified educational loans at a maximum of \$25,000 per year for a minimum two-year contract period. Additional one-year extensions may be awarded for a maximum of \$35,000 per year. For more information, contact the NHSC Loan Repayment Program (1-800-221-9393) or visit their web site: <http://www.bphc.hrsa.gov>. Select Programs, then click on Scholarship, Loan Repayment, and Grant Programs. Scroll to NHSC Loan Repayment Program.
- If you are a nurse (LPN, RN, or ARNP) and have outstanding student loans from state/federal programs or commercial lending institutions, you may be eligible for the Florida Nursing Student Loan Forgiveness Program. The goal of this program is to encourage nurses to seek employment in areas of the state where critical shortages exist. Nurses must be licensed in Florida and must work full-time at eligible employment sites (such as county health departments, community and migrant health centers, state-operated medical facilities, or one of the state's statutory teaching hospitals). Participation is for a maximum of four years, or until your loan is paid in full, whichever occurs first. For an application or more information, call 1-888-827-2004.
- If you choose to practice in a medically underserved area of the state that does not qualify for loan repayment, remember that your local AHEC has an interest in retaining you at that site. Therefore, you may qualify for a number of other incentives through your local AHEC (i.e., free or reduced CME, library and learning resources, technical assistance, consultation services, clinical teaching opportunities and faculty appointments, etc.). For more information, contact the AHEC that serves the county in which you plan to practice.

### **What if I have a J1 visa and wish to remain in Florida?**

If you are a foreign educated physician in a U.S. residency program and wish to remain in the United States, you must apply and be approved for a J1 visa waiver. The Florida State Health Officer may request 20 J1 visa waivers per year from the U.S. Information Agency. J1 applicants must : 1) be board eligible or certified in a primary care specialty (family practice, internal medicine, pediatrics, obstetrics/gynecology); 2) be licensed in Florida or have applied for Florida licensure; and 3) have been offered a three-year contract with a public health provider, such as a county health department, community/migrant health center or homeless clinic which is located in a designated HPSA. For more information, contact (850) 487-2044.

### **What is AHEC?**

The federal government began developing a national system of Area Health Education Centers (AHECs) during the early 1970s as a means of addressing the maldistribution of health professionals in medically underserved areas throughout the nation. AHEC's mission is to improve access to primary health care in medically underserved areas through academic - community educational partnerships designed to recruit, train, and retain health professionals for underserved areas. Your local AHEC may be instrumental in helping you locate a position in an underserved area. Contact them at the numbers below:

West Florida AHEC (850) 682-2552	Escambia, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, Walton
Big Bend AHEC (850) 224-1177	Bay, Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Madison, Taylor, Wakulla, Washington
Suwannee River AHEC (904) 462-1551	Alachua, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Lafayette, Levy, Marion, Putnam, Suwannee, Union
Northeast Florida AHEC (904) 549-5881	Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, St. Johns, Volusia
Gulfcoast North AHEC (813) 631-4350	Citrus, Hernando, Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas
Gulfcoast South AHEC (941) 361-6602	Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee, Sarasota
Central Florida AHEC (407) 889-2292	Brevard, Hardee, Highlands, Lake, Orange, Osceola, Polk, Seminole, Sumter
Everglades AHEC (561) 844-1099	Broward, Collier, Glades, Hendry, Indian River, Lee, Martin, Okeechobee, Palm Beach, St. Lucie
Dade County AHEC (305) 670-6953	Dade
Florida Keys AHEC (305) 743-7111	Monroe

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