For the past four years, the Florida AHEC Network has had the great privilege of working closely with Dr. John Agwunobi, Florida’s Secretary of Health from October, 2001 until September, 2005.

Secretary Agwunobi consistently looked to the AHEC Network as a reliable partner to aid the Department of Health in carrying out a variety of projects common to the missions of both agencies. Among these projects were education and screening initiatives to address chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, diabetes and obesity. The DOH also utilized AHEC’s statewide network of ten centers to help implement programs designed to improve health literacy and eliminate health disparities in minority populations; reduce tobacco use among adults and teens; increase the rate of breastfeeding among new mothers; and promote physical fitness as a goal for all Floridians.

In July, 2005, Dr. Agwunobi was nominated to serve as Assistant Secretary for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. His diligent service to the people of Florida and his passion for leadership and advocacy will be sustained by the state’s new Secretary of Health, Dr. Rony François.

Dr. François immigrated to Florida from Haiti in 1979 and has a medical degree and a Ph.D. in toxicology from the University of South Florida in Tampa, as well as a master’s degree in exercise physiology from the University of Central Florida in Orlando. As the new Secretary of Health, Dr. François has vowed to continue to work on initiatives begun by Dr. Agwunobi over the last several years, including looking at ways to reduce the disparities that exist in access to health care among minorities.

“This is a tremendous opportunity for continuing the progress this administration has made in strengthening community partnerships, advancing health care for children and minorities and reducing the incidence of chronic disease in our state,” said Dr. François. The Florida AHEC Network bids a fond farewell to Dr. John Agwunobi and extends a warm welcome to Dr. Rony François.
The Florida AHEC Network Mission:
To create community and academic partnerships for the health of underserved communities.

BY THE NUMBERS

22.2% Percentage of adult Floridians 18–64 who were uninsured in 2004.

—Florida Health Insurance Studies Comparative Findings, August, 2005

“Having Health Insurance Reduces Mortality Rates by 10 - 15 %.”
—Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured

In a study of more than 28,000 Florida patients, those without insurance were more likely to be diagnosed with skin, colorectal, breast, and prostate cancers at later, more dangerous stages than those with insurance.

—American College of Physicians & American Society of Internal Medicine

24% The percentage of Floridians without a medical home.

SPECIAL PROJECTS with the Florida Department of Health

The Florida Department of Health Division of Health Access and Tobacco and the Bureau of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion utilized the Florida AHEC Network to implement a number of statewide initiatives addressing the topics of health literacy, obesity and tobacco:

- Tobacco Quitline Support: AHEC subcontracted with the Florida Quitline provider for statewide, toll-free tobacco cessation counseling and information. This included a monthly data report on the number of callers, caller ages by age groups, frequency of calls and caller locations.

- SWAT Youth Summit, Executive Committee & Board of Director’s Meetings: AHEC participated in planning, coordinating and providing logistical support for the annual Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT) Youth Summit held in Orlando February, 25–27, 2005. Over 300 participants attended the Summit and over 200 students, chaperones, and DOH staff attended the committee meetings.

- Secretary’s Obesity Summits: AHEC served as meeting planner for four statewide Secretary’s Obesity Summits held in Orlando, Tallahassee, Jacksonville and Miami. The summits targeted specific audiences including businesses, schools, community partners and healthcare providers. Over 1,000 individuals attended these events.

- Florida Partnership for Promoting Physical Activity & Healthful Nutrition Strategic Planning Workgroup Meeting: AHEC served as meeting planner for a statewide meeting of the Florida Partnership for Promoting Physical Activity and Healthful Nutrition. Fifty-five individuals participated in this event.

- Obesity Media Campaign: AHEC utilized radio and television physical activity public service announcements developed by the National AD Council to target Liberty, Calhoun, Holmes, Hardee, Manatee, Madison, Jefferson, Taylor and Lafayette Counties, areas with the highest prevalence of overweight and obesity.

- Obesity Resource Materials: AHEC purchased and disseminated brochures, posters, and other materials promoting physical activity, healthy nutrition, breastfeeding and decreased television viewing time for all of Florida's 67 county health departments.

- PBS Obesity Documentary: AHEC contracted with the Public Broadcasting System for production of a six-part series on the issue of obesity and its related risk factors and co-morbidities.

- Health Literacy Curriculum Development and Regional Trainings: AHEC developed the “Health Literacy: A Prescription for Clarity” curriculum. This curriculum was distributed to all 67 county health departments and the AHEC Network conducted ten regional trainings for health professionals on the topic using the curriculum. Approximately 426 participants attended these trainings.

- Regional Trainings on Smoking During Pregnancy & Postpartum: AHEC conducted ten regional trainings for health professionals on effectively addressing the dangers of smoking during pregnancy, the dangers of secondhand smoke, and motivating parents to stop smoking. 360 participants attended these trainings.

- Web-Enhanced Audio-Teleconference Trainings: AHEC planned and implemented two web-enhanced audio-teleconferences for health professionals on the topic of reducing smoking during pregnancy and postpartum. The program successfully presented the materials to over 400 participants.

- Smoking During Pregnancy & Postpartum Resource Materials: AHEC purchased and distributed pamphlets, posters and other educational materials promoting the importance of not smoking during pregnancy to county health departments and Healthy Start Coalitions.
During FY 2005, the Florida AHEC Network received $13,721,385 in State of Florida general revenue and tobacco settlement funds and funds to implement health literacy, obesity and tobacco control projects. These dollars, administered by the Florida Department of Health, were allocated to each of the following AHEC programmatic strategies presented in this annual report to meet local, regional and statewide objectives.

**Caring for Communities:** AHEC brings additional resources to needy communities by extending academic resources and health professions education to medically underserved communities and offers health professions students the opportunity to gain exposure to the health care needs and potential practice opportunities in these communities. AHEC accomplishes this primarily through the introduction of academic faculty at underserved sites and service/learning programs for students in underserved communities throughout Florida.

**Serving While Learning:** AHEC influences health professions education programs to enhance their curricula with community-based clinical rotations, interdisciplinary training, distance education and other programs vital to students' learning. AHEC also identifies local preceptors, coordinates community rotations and serves as a point of contact for academic health centers within the communities where students train.

**Pursuing the Path to Health Care:** AHEC offers programs and activities designed to influence the future health professional workforce by stimulating and promoting youth interest in health careers. AHEC accomplishes this by recruiting under-represented youth and those from disadvantaged backgrounds into health professional shadowing experiences, academic preparatory programs and health career camps.

**Connecting Communities with Resources:** AHEC provides information and support to community health professionals to reduce isolation of providers in medically deprived areas, improve access and use of educational and informational resources, and enhance the quality of care. AHEC offers an extensive array of continuing education programs and library resources as well as technical assistance activities directed toward the recruitment and placement of health care professionals in underserved communities throughout Florida.

**Special Projects/State Priorities:** AHEC engages in numerous special projects to reduce health disparities and improve access to quality health care. These activities include statewide programs to train community health workers to reach medically underserved populations, working with communities to address the issue of tobacco use, and developing programs targeting health literacy and cultural sensitivity.

**Evaluation and Administration:** AHEC conducts a variety of activities to evaluate the impact of its programs and administers the extensive network of affiliation agreements with academic and community partners necessary to accomplish its work.

### 2004-2005 Allocation of State AHEC Funds
($13,721,385)

- **Evaluation/Administration:** 9%
- **Professional Recruitment:** 4.8%
- **Pre-Professional Health Careers Orientation:** 10.8%
- **Graduate Medical Education:** 5.8%
- **Undergraduate Medical Education:** 19.6%
- **Nurse Practitioner/Physician Assistant Education:** 5%
- **Dental/Dental Hygiene Education:** 3.3%
- **Allied Health/Other Professional Education:** 7.2%
- **Continuing Education:** 11.2%
- **Library/Information Dissemination:** 6.4%
- **Health Promotion/Disease Prevention:** 12.4%
The Florida AHEC Network continues to evolve into an essential part of the state’s health care safety net for its estimated 2.7 million medically vulnerable citizens and the primary care providers who serve them.

With ten community-based Area Health Education Centers strategically located throughout Florida’s 67 counties and with program offices in each of the state’s five medical schools, the Florida AHEC Network provides a variety of activities, services and programs to increase access to medical care and reduce health disparities for Florida’s medically underserved populations. The Florida AHEC Network accomplishes this by:

- Providing over $17 million in health care services to patients and continuing education programs to providers at medically underserved sites in rural and urban communities throughout the state;
- Enabling 15,769 practitioners to stay current in their fields by providing over 76,287 hours of continuing education programs on topics such as adolescent and child health, cardiovascular disease, injury & violence prevention, diabetes, nutrition, obesity and HIV/AIDS;
- Delivering more than 45,000 hours of health careers enrichment activities to 942 primary school, community college, university and technical school students through health career camps, shadowing opportunities, and academic enhancement programs;
- Training almost 6,750 health professions students for 1,168,971 hours in community-based settings in order to expose them to the needs, challenges and practice opportunities that exist in these communities;
- Supporting the informational needs of practitioners by providing more than 4,000 database searches, journal articles, reference texts and audiovisual materials to enhance their clinical skills;
- Performing 6,000 hours of technical assistance to community partners such as county health departments, community health centers, schools, social service agencies and more;
- Educating over 152,000 Floridians with over 275,000 hours of regional programs on heart disease, obesity, physical fitness, tobacco use and other leading contributors to illness and chronic disease; and
- Reaching nearly 5,000 individuals through trained community health workers with their linkages to churches, migrant farmworker communities and health service agencies.

The Florida AHEC Network’s partnership with academic training programs and community organizations has created unique opportunities to address needs in underserved communities. This report contains examples of many innovative approaches used by the Florida AHEC Network to extend academic resources, influence health professions education, provide information and support services for health professionals, influence the future health professions workforce, and address state health priorities.
TALK the TALK:

**PRIMARY CARE** is the term used for health care providers who act as the primary or first point of care for patients. Primary care providers treat people of all ages for common medical problems. They work in community settings as opposed to hospitals and may be medical or osteopathic doctors, physician's assistants, or nurse practitioners. The Florida AHEC Network seeks to increase the number of primary care providers as well as the number of dentists, psychiatrists, pharmacists and other health care professionals who work in rural and underserved areas.

**MEDICAL HOME** is a patient’s usual or primary source of health care. A partnership develops between the patient and the primary health care practitioner and together they work to achieve maximum potential. Emphasis is placed on both wellness and treatment.

**HEALTH DISPARITIES** refer to gaps in the quality of health and health care across racial and ethnic groups. These gaps often result from barriers certain racial and ethnic groups encounter when trying to enter the health care system or differences in the quality of health care different ethnic and racial groups receive.

**COMMUNITY-BASED PRECEPTORS** supervise the clinical training of health professions students at sites outside the academic setting. These sites may include county health departments, migrant/community health centers, rural clinics and more.

**AHEC Program Highlights**

**Gulfcoast North AHEC and Gulfcoast South AHEC** partner with the University of South Florida School of Social Work to place social work students at medically underserved clinic sites for the School of Social Work AHEC Field Experience. Through this partnership, needed mental health counseling and social work services are provided at medically underserved community sites.

**The USF AHEC Program** coordinates the Health Sciences Center Service Corps which provides opportunities for medical, nursing, public health and physical therapy students to work together on specific service/learning projects such as health fairs and service events such as food, book and clothing drives throughout the year.
When it comes to the relationship between AHEC and the University of Florida’s Physician Assistant Program, there seems to be a perfect fit. Wayne Bottom, Associate Dean for Physician Assistant Studies, remembers when he knew of no physician assistants practicing in the Panhandle area and attributes AHEC for making a difference. “AHEC came into existence at just the right time. With limited faculty and staff, there was no way that I could have developed all of the rural practice rotations without AHEC. Of our 150 active clinical training sites, over 50% have been AHEC-generated.” During the last ten years, AHEC has coordinated an average of 119 month long rotations for the PA students each year, which is almost a fifth of their total rotations. And it’s during these rotations that the students get the real-life experience of working with the medically underserved in both rural and inner city areas.

Paige Collier, Director of West Florida AHEC in Crestview, considers the PA rotations as the heart of her clinical training. “We’re so far away from UF, it’s hard to get some students to come this far. Although our doctors didn’t know how to work with PA’s at first, they now realize how valuable they are to their practice. Many PA graduates continue working in our area.” West Florida AHEC consistently hosts the largest number of PA students and maintains a cadre of interested physicians to work with them. One such physician, Dr. Dennis Stewart from Crestview, hosted four PA students for one-month rotations during this past year. He describes his reward as “seeing the light bulb go off when the students finally understand what a disease process is really all about and thereby improving their clinical skills and success in their PA program.”

Taylen Peaden, a recent graduate of the program who hails from the West Florida area, appreciated the opportunity to complete his clinical rotations near his home. Peaden now practices in a primary care rural health clinic in East Point, Florida. He is the third PA in Franklin County, a rural county with a population of less than 11,000. Peaden readily acknowledges the influence of his AHEC rotations in his choice of practice locations: “AHEC provided great opportunities for me to work with rural and low income patients. This directed me towards working with medically underserved populations for my professional practice.”

PAs in Florida are much more likely to stay in Florida when they complete their education. According to Bottom, two-thirds of the practicing graduates of the UF PA program are still practicing in Florida, unlike medical students who are often placed out of state to complete their residencies. These individuals frequently chose to stay in those other states.

Admission into the UF PA Program is no easy task. The process is competitive, with over 600 applications received for the 60 admissions to UF each year. To assist dedicated students who want to increase their chances of admission, Big Bend AHEC has initiated a Pre-PA Program, which is underway with their first seven students. These current juniors in college have one year in the program to complete shadowing and volunteer hours with health professionals, earn their certification as a nursing assistant, and complete their PA applications and mock interviews with the assistance of AHEC staff.

From recruitment and training to placement in rural and underserved areas, the UF Physician Assistant Program and AHEC have a relationship that is indeed a perfect fit.

WHY IT’S IMPORTANT:

Primary care doctors, particularly family medicine practitioners, are more likely to locate in a rural or underserved areas.

BY THE NUMBERS:

2.3 million: The number of Floridians living in health professions shortage areas. An additional 608 primary care physicians are needed to meet their basic health care needs.

61,000: By 2020, Florida will need 61,000 more nurses than are currently projected to be available.

57%: The percentage of Florida medical students that chose primary care residency programs from 2002-2005. The national average is 38%.

61%: The percentage of residents that remained in Florida after completing their residency programs.

20%: The percentage of Florida MDs who graduated from Florida medical schools.
Rural students explore science education

**BY THE NUMBERS**

45,000: Over 45,000 hours of enrichment programs were provided to students in grades K-12, as well as to students in technical schools, community colleges and universities. Of 942 students attending these programs, 73% were racially under-represented or economically disadvantaged.

70%: Increase in number of AHEC enrichment program participants from 2003 to 2005.

12%: The percentage of Hispanic/Latino students in Florida medical schools.

2%: The percentage of Florida dentists who are Black/African American.

6%: The percentage of Black/African American students in Florida medical schools.

3%: Although African Americans comprise 15% of the state's population, only 3% of Florida's doctors are African American.

**TALK the TALK:**

**CULTURALLY REFLECTIVE HEALTHCARE** allows patients an opportunity to be treated by health care providers who are similar to their own racial/ethnic backgrounds. Patients rate their physicians' decision-making styles as more participatory.

**HEALTH CAREERS PIPELINE** recruits young people, especially under-represented minorities and disadvantaged youth, from elementary school to college, into health professions training programs and follows them through their professional training with the goal of having them practice in rural and underserved areas.

**STUDENT ENRICHMENT** programs such as health career camps, mentoring programs and academic preparatory courses designed to generate interest in health careers particularly among disadvantaged and underrepresented youth.

**AHEC Program Highlights**

**Big Bend AHEC** introduces students to gerontology with Gerontopoly: A Game of Successful Aging. This interactive game has students move along a life-sized game board while experiencing various life events such as the birth of a grandchild or the diagnosis of a chronic disease. Creative props such as walkers, wheelchairs, crazy dentures, and ear plugs are popular with students from middle school through graduate nursing programs.

**Northeast Florida AHEC** improves its rural elementary school physical activity and nutrition program, Fun 2B Fit, with the addition of Fit Families. This program coaches the families of children in the Fun 2B Fit program on family activities, grocery choices, food preparation, and health education. Dramatic impact is being made in the new healthy direction children and families are heading with these programs.
Twelve year old Jimmy Smith has decided he wants to be a doctor when he grows up. A seventh grader at Madison County Central School, Smith learned about the kidneys and other organs in the school’s Rural Science Students Together Reaching Instructional Diversity and Excellence (Rural SSTRIDE) Program sponsored by the Florida State University College of Medicine AHEC Program. Now, he wants to be a doctor; maybe a kidney specialist.

“They play a big role in your body. They filter the waste in your blood,” Smith said. “And I thought your kidneys were somewhere in front of you, but they’re really in the back.”

Rural SSTRIDE is an outreach program that offers science education, tutoring, and extracurricular experiences for students interested in medical careers. “I think the Rural SSTRIDE class is pretty neat because you learn about how the body and cells work together to make your body healthy,” Smith said. “The class is good and everybody cooperates with one another.”

Begun in Leon County, Rural SSTRIDE expanded to Okaloosa, Gadsden and Madison counties. The Madison County course is taught by middle school resource teacher Lynne Sapp, an educator and FSU alum. Sapp attended Rural SSTRIDE training at the FSU College of Medicine as part of her preparation.

The program’s strengths, said Sapp, include an ample supply of teaching materials, strong parental involvement, and small class size—educational advantages she dreamed of for years. “Here I am with 14 kids whose parents support and value education, and I have all the materials I could ever want,” she said. “My dream has come true.”

The FSU Rural SSTRIDE Program provides all the materials to grant students the opportunity to perform experiments and activities using their own microscopes, beakers, and stopwatches instead of just watching the teacher perform the experiment for them. The students have participated in a variety of activities ranging from assembling a disarticulated skeleton to dissecting fetal pigs.

Thirteen year old Kristen Campbell said the Rural SSTRIDE class takes science to a higher level than most middle school classes. For example, students use a college-level textbook. “We use more advanced vocabulary,” Campbell said. “The class goes a lot deeper into the curriculum.”

Part of the goal of the program is to encourage students to continue their science education. After this year, Campbell, Smith and the other seventh-grade students will move into an eighth-grade Rural SSTRIDE course to continue preparing them for high school medical health professions courses. Sapp’s daughter, Stephanie, is a sophomore at North Florida Community College in Madison and mentors Rural SSTRIDE students. “They’re learning so much that I didn’t learn until high school or even in my college anatomy class,” Sapp said. She wishes she had the same opportunity. “They’re learning a lot of things that will stay with them, and they’re learning it at an early age.”

**WHY IT’S IMPORTANT:**

- Florida has the oldest physician workforce in the nation (26% over the age of 65).
- Only 9% of Florida’s physicians are age 35 or younger.
- Forty percent of registered nurses will be 50 years of age or older by 2010.
- Florida continues to be one of the fastest growing states in the country and is projected to grow 60% between 2000 and 2030.
Healthcare without borders, libraries without walls

Professional Continuing Education Programs
(Percentage of 76,287 Participant Hours)

The Florida AHEC Network provided health care professionals with over 76,000 hours of continuing education programs on a variety of important topics last year.

TALK the TALK:

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE is help, something many providers in rural and underserved areas greatly need. AHEC staff provide technical assistance to community partners through a variety of services including community health initiatives, community development, conference planning, curriculum development, preceptor development, program evaluation, and/or language translation and other efforts to build community capacity. The actual definition of technical assistance depends on a partners’ unique needs.

CONTINUING EDUCATION is a program, course or organized learning experience taken to enhance personal or professional goals.

Florida AHEC Network: Comparison of Total Continuing Education Unique Participants from All Sites and Underserved Sites, 2000—2005

The Florida AHEC Network targets its continuing education programs to health professionals in rural and underserved areas. Last year, over 75% of participants in these programs were from underserved sites.

AHEC Program Highlights

Big Bend AHEC and the Florida AHEC Network have developed courses to help nurses meet their mandatory continuing education requirements. Domestic Violence is a web based course and Medical Errors is an easy to use DVD.

The Florida Keys AHEC works closely with US Army Special Forces Underwater Operations in Key West to present a Hyperbaric and Diving Medicine Symposium. This program involves experts from the military as well as the local college and hospital who discuss Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy, Diving Accident/Treatment, and Marine Injuries/Trauma. The program also includes a tour of the local decompression chamber.
An important part of the University of South Florida AHEC Program is providing our community partners with timely library and information services so they are up to date on the newest developments and best practices in health care.

USF AHEC and its two centers, Gulfcoast North AHEC and Gulfcoast South AHEC, cover a nine-county region, offering a variety of library and information services to practitioners who treat the medically underserved. Services include providing continuing education for professional and personal development; traditional reference skills of a professional medical librarian; database searches, access and training; internet and technological support; and interlibrary loan, including provision of online subscription journals and full-text articles free of charge. For the busy clinician in remote or medically underserved areas, access to these services improves patient care and saves the community partner both time and money.

One such community partner is DeSoto Memorial Hospital, a 49 bed full service, rural hospital in Arcadia that serves a largely rural/migrant population. Memorial is the only hospital in DeSoto County and as such is looked upon by the community as the source of medical care and health information. “The challenge for the physicians, nurses and other healthcare providers,” says Yvonne Hunt, Director of Infection Control and Education, “is to stay current on research and trends in healthcare.” But without an adequate library on site, this is not always an easy task. “The hospital’s ‘library’ is very limited,” explains Ms. Hunt. USF AHEC met the challenge by filling the information gap. “Each department was asked to submit a request for a relevant text or reference book. We hoped to receive one of these items and were delighted to receive all of the requested items!”

DeSoto Memorial’s physicians, nurses, and administrators have also requested information and literature searches to assist them with identifying the best treatment options available. “Nurses utilize the Drug Guidebooks when questions arise as to how a patient’s medications might interact,” explains Ms. Hunt, who confides “AHEC provides information that would be otherwise unattainable. Just knowing we have a link keeps us from feeling isolated.”

After the devastation of last year’s hurricane season, many community partners lost basic reference items essential to their work. Just ask Jeanne Wyman, the nursing director of Charlotte County Health Department, about the devastating effects of Hurricane Charley on her sites in Port Charlotte and Punta Gorda. Among the losses were two sets of prized clinical reference texts. USF AHEC was privileged to replace those sets with new, updated materials and even add a few more resources for the special needs shelters and other sites. “I am quite sure the replacement libraries are far more current and extensive than what existed before,” Ms. Wyman attests. “What you have done is so generous,” she says of AHEC services. “I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart.” Even in today’s digital world, books are valued and in demand.

**BY THE NUMBERS:**

- **76,000:** The Florida AHEC Network provided over 76,000 hours of continuing education programs to practitioners throughout the state. Over 55,000 of these hours were for practitioners in underserved sites.
- **16,000:** Over 16,000 individuals participated in Florida AHEC Network continuing education programs. Over 12,000 of these participants were from underserved sites.
- **6,000:** Florida AHEC Network staff provided over 6,000 hours of technical assistance to partners in community clinics, schools, health departments, community health centers, social service agencies and other organizations.

**WHY IT’S IMPORTANT:**

There are many parts of Florida in which access to quality continuing education programs or information services performed by trained librarians is not readily available. Rural and underserved providers can’t afford to hire their own trained health information specialists, support a professional medical library or travel to attend continuing education programs. However, the need for quality education and information services is growing, and the impact of such services on health care outcomes has been demonstrated.
TALK the TALK:

**SERVICE/LEARNING** combines the experience of community service with the benefits of academic study and personal reflection. By exposing students to real-life issues and solutions, students gain valuable insight into their future careers.

With its extensive ties to local communities, AHECs are able to promote community health and serve as vehicles for matching the educational needs of health professions faculty and students with the healthcare needs of local communities.

Service/Learning is extensively used by AHECs as a means to accomplish educational objectives for health professions students while delivering services to underserved populations.

**CLINICAL TRAINING** is learning that takes place in community-based health care settings where residents and students from medicine, nursing, dentistry and other health professions apply the knowledge gained in the classroom to caring for patients.

**PRECERTORS** teach and mentor students and residents in an office, clinic or hospital setting.

**AHEC Program Highlights**

Central Florida AHEC sends health professions students from the University of Central Florida to participate in the Caribbean Health Fair held in Orlando. These students provide timely, culturally sensitive health education in areas such as high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, diet, exercise and tuberculosis.

Medical students from UM provide quality care to lots of little patients at the Center for Haitian Studies in Miami.

**Florida AHEC Network Clinical Training Hours 2001-2005**

- 2001: (946,625) hours
- 2002: (953,981) hours
- 2003: (970,041) hours
- 2004: (941,236) hours
- 2005: (1,168,971) hours

- **Underserved Community Based Sites**
- **All Community Based Sites**
Florida AHECs sponsor service/learning programs in community and migrant health centers, county health departments and other primary care sites in underserved communities throughout the state. Annually, over 6,000 health professions students and medical residents team with faculty from medicine, dentistry, nursing and other health fields to deliver the equivalent of 500 FTEs of patient care and preventive services and help expand the availability of health care services in medically needy communities throughout Florida.

One such service/learning program in Miami’s Little Haiti underscores the mutual benefits reaped by both the medically underserved Haitian community and the medical student/physician teams who participate in the program. Approximately 2,500 low-income, uninsured residents living in the Little Haiti area of Miami access healthcare from the Center for Haitian Studies Health Center. Here, medical students from the University of Miami train under the guidance of Dr. Marie Denise Gervais, a Department of Family Medicine faculty member supported by the UM AHEC Program. During a five week Family Medicine Clerkship, these future physicians learn to provide culturally appropriate medical care to families from the Haitian community as part of their medical education. Dr. Gervais, who is fluent in Creole, French and Spanish, is an outstanding role model for her students and patients alike.

While training at the health center, the medical students are immersed in a teaching milieu that stresses comprehensive and interdisciplinary approaches to health care and respect for the cultural beliefs of their patients. Students have the opportunity to learn a great deal about the Creole language, barriers to seeking health care, and illnesses such as hypertension and diabetes which are prevalent in the Haitian community. They also participate in research and health education activities conducted in churches, health fairs and in the health center waiting room.

During their clerkships, students become attuned to the roles culture and social issues play in the health care of a poor immigrant population. For instance, students quickly learn that patients may need to prioritize food and housing costs above paying for medical care and that transportation and lack of health insurance are limiting factors for accessing care. They become aware that many of their patients seek out natural healers with no medical background to treat their medical conditions. At the same time, patients accessing care at the center receive compassionate, culturally appropriate, high quality health care services not otherwise available to them.

Evaluations of the training medical students receive at the Little Haiti Health Center consistently find it to be a valuable addition to their medical education, and the students highly recommend the rotation to their classmates. In the words of one UM medical student, “I had a great opportunity to be a doctor. I feel more comfortable with physical exams, talking to patients in an office setting and making plans with my patients.” Everyone benefits!

BY THE NUMBERS:

1,169,000: Last year, the Florida AHEC Network provided almost 1,169,000 hours of clinical training to health professions students and residents at community-based settings in order to expose them to the needs, challenges and practice opportunities that exist in these locations. Over 713,000 of these hours took place in medically underserved sites.

WHY IT’S IMPORTANT:

Nationally, the shortage of primary care providers is expected to continue and worsen. By 2020, approximately 90,000 more doctors will be needed than will be available. Rural and underserved communities will be especially hard hit by this shortfall.

Caring for Communities:

Medical Students and Miami’s Haitian Community Learn from Each Other
Because of its geographic proximity to Latin America and the Caribbean Basin, Florida’s population is among the most ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse in the nation. Associated with this multicultural diversity are the persistent health disparities that exist in many of the state’s immigrant and minority communities, and the challenges to our health care system in effectively addressing these disparities.

The Nova Southeastern University AHEC Program, in conjunction with the Florida AHEC Network and the Florida Department of Health, has been actively coordinating numerous statewide strategies to address the ever-increasing health needs of the state’s many immigrant and minority communities. These strategies, which include cultural competency, language, and health literacy training of current and future health care providers, focus on preparing a health workforce that is able to effectively deliver health services within these multi-ethnic communities.

A key component of these AHEC efforts is the recruitment and training of lay Community Health Workers (CHW) to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate health promotion/disease prevention services within targeted high-risk communities where health disparities are the greatest. In this regard, AHEC has been utilizing its broad linkages with community-based health organizations throughout the state to work with CHWs to promote better health within their communities by addressing nutrition, physical activity, early cancer detection, HIV/AIDS, and other prevailing health issues.

Within hard-to-reach communities, trained CHWs serve as ambassadors of health who are able to provide outreach services, case identification, information dissemination, health education, and facilitate access to existing health services. Their role in promoting health to targeted populations has long been valued, particularly with regards to promoting tuberculosis screening, breast and cervical cancer screening, and encouraging increased access to prenatal services.

The results of this AHEC effort have been impressive. During the past year alone, over 200 CHWs throughout Florida participated in this AHEC training effort to impart health promotion education in their respective communities. These CHWs have in turn provided well over 500 health education and informational presentations to a combined total of nearly 5,000 community members through linkages with migrant farmworker organizations, churches, and health service agencies in numerous Florida communities.

Myrian Crissien, affiliated with the Human Services Coalition of Miami-Dade County, expressed her great satisfaction as a CHW with the training she received. “AHEC has provided great opportunities for me professionally and has enabled me to serve my community better by providing me with trainings on important health topics, educational materials and other support.” Similarly, Dumas Lafleur, a CHW serving the multi-ethnic communities of Opa Locka and Little Haiti also commented “I feel very much empowered by AHEC as a Community Health Worker. Some of my clients, because of cultural reasons, would consult a doctor as a last resort when they are sick. AHEC’s support and training has helped me make health education and prevention a priority in many of my clients’ lives.”
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