

Press Release – For Release January 13, 2011

Hamilton Center Joins the Rural Health Innovation Collaborative (RHIC) as Primary Member

The Rural Health Innovation Collaborative (RHIC) is pleased to announce the addition of Hamilton Center, Inc. as its newest Primary Member. Other Primary Members include: Union Hospital and its Richard G. Lugar Center for Rural Health, Indiana State University, Indiana University School of Medicine, Ivy Tech Community College Wabash Valley, the City of Terre Haute, and the Terre Haute Economic Development Corporation. The RHIC also includes the Vermillion Parke Community Health Center as a Supporting Member. The major focus of the RHIC is on educating and training health care professions students to work together to provide high quality health care, particularly in Indiana's rural communities where health care providers are so urgently needed.

“Improving access to mental health services in rural areas has been identified by RHIC members as a significant area of need. We're excited to bring Hamilton Center to the table to help meet this need,” said David R. Doerr, president and chief executive officer of Union Health System and chairman of the RHIC board of directors.

Galen Goode, CEO of Hamilton Center, stated that “ Integrating primary and behavioral health in both planning and delivery of service provides an improved opportunity to better address an individual's total health needs and the health issues that face rural communities. We are excited with the opportunity to participate with the esteemed members of the RHIC.”

A recent study commissioned by RHIC partners and conducted by Indiana University School of Medicine's Bowen Research Center, found shortages in almost every health care field in west-central Indiana. While nurses and physicians topped the list, significant shortages of psychologists, physical therapists, pharmacists, social workers, health educators, speech pathologists, and physician assistants were also found.

Shortages of providers are particularly severe in Indiana's more rural areas. Sixty percent of Indiana counties (55 of 92) are located in rural or non-metropolitan areas. Twenty-six (26) of the 55 rural counties in Indiana are partially or completely medically underserved or have shortages of health professionals. This designation indicates that residents in certain rural areas have fewer physicians than urban areas and a higher rate of unemployment, poverty, and population over the age of 65 years.

In addition to alleviating these shortages, the RHIC is focused on improving the educational model to train students inter-professionally rather than separately by discipline. RHIC Executive Director, Sarah Snider, stated that “the traditional model is to train our students separately, with physicians training in one location, nurses in another, social workers in yet another, etc. We expect these students, once they graduate, to join a team of providers to care for patients. We know that it takes many types of providers to be able to provide the best care for people. It is imperative that we update our training models to ensure an optimally prepared workforce and optimal health care for patients. Hamilton Center brings a very important focus to this effort through its expertise in the behavioral health care arena. I am very excited about having them at the table as a member of the RHIC.”

The mission of the RHIC is to improve and expand education and training of healthcare professionals and future healthcare professionals, especially for those committed to serving rural and underserved populations. Learn more about the RHIC at www.therhic.org. Learn more about Hamilton Center at www.HamiltonCenter.org.