

## **Press Release – For Release February 9, 2011**

### Indiana Rural Health Association Joins the Rural Health Innovation Collaborative as Supporting Member

The Rural Health Innovation Collaborative (RHIC) is pleased to announce the addition of the Indiana Rural Health Association (IRHA) as its newest Supporting Member. Other RHIC 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, the Terre Haute Economic Development Corporation, Hamilton Center and the Vermillion Parke Community Health Center.

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.

The mission of IRHA is to enhance the health and well-being of rural populations in Indiana through leadership, education, advocacy, collaboration, and resource development. "IRHA's focus on rural health education and collaboration is a great fit with the RHIC's overall mission. This partnership will boost our mutual efforts to improve the lives of people living in rural communities across Indiana." said David R. Doerr, president and chief executive officer of Union Health System and chairman of the RHIC board of directors.

A recent study commissioned by RHIC partners and conducted by Indiana University School of Medicine's Bowen Research Center, found workforce 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.

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 then expect these students, once they graduate, to join a team of providers to care for patients. Thus, it is imperative that we update our training models to include team-based learning to ensure an optimally prepared workforce and optimal health care for patients. IRHA brings a statewide focus and visibility to this effort. I am very excited about having them at the table as a member of the RHIC."

Don Kelso, Executive Director of IRHA, stated that "The missions of our organizations are strongly aligned in terms of development of state-of-the art educational reform and programs that IRHA can then provide in an educational format for its membership. In addition, preparation of a workforce for rural communities will be extremely helpful to IRHA as it strives to assist rural communities across Indiana with their health care workforce needs."

Learn more about the RHIC at [www.therhic.org](http://www.therhic.org). Learn more about IRHA at [www.indianaruralhealth.org](http://www.indianaruralhealth.org).