

2010 Rural Healthy People

A Companion Document to Healthy People 2010

A Report Prepared by the Southwest Rural Health Research Center,
School of Rural Public Health, The Texas A&M University System Health Science Center

VOLUME I

MODELS FOR PRACTICE

FOCUS AREA: ACCESS (EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES)

Program Name: Rural Health Community Systems

Location: Steuben County, New York

Problem Addressed: Rural Emergency Medical Services Access

Healthy People 2010 Objective: 1-11

Web Address: <http://www.steubencony.org/emo/rhcs.html>

SNAPSHOT

Rural Health Community Systems (RHCS) was created in 1997 when the CEOs of Ira Davenport, Noyes Hospital, and Rural/Metro Medical Services Southern Tier formed an official "Rural Health Network." A rural health network is an administrative tool that has the flexibility to establish new systems that can be used by providers to plan, coordinate, and deliver health care services. This rural health network now covers all of Steuben County and the environs of Allegany, Livingston, Ontario, and other counties in the State of New York. The Rural Health Community Systems Rural Health Network decided to focus on emergency medical services (EMS) and to help EMS agencies in the county recruit and retain even more quality, dedicated, and knowledgeable volunteers. The Rural Health Network developed activities including a regional EMS system review, an EMS youth corps, hospital emergency department and EMS personnel integration, and a program to provide regional law enforcement vehicles with automatic external defibrillators for use in sudden cardiac arrest.

As a result of its activities, RHCS was chosen as an example of "best practice" by the National Rural Health Association EMS vision conference.

THE MODEL

Blueprint: RHCS was created in 1997 and is an association of nonprofit and proprietary corporations, public agencies, and individuals providing health care and related services in central Steuben County in New York State. Steuben County has a population of 98,726 (U.S. Census, 2000) and is classified as non-metropolitan using the rural-urban continuum coding methodology (ERS: USDA, 2000). The organizations came together in a collaborative forum to address common rural health service issues. RHCS's Rural Health Network focuses on emergency medical services, with the objectives of expanding the scope of access to EMS and expanding system resources for community education about EMS. In other words, the network was developed to respond to a crucial need—helping to smooth the rocky

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road of service provision and improving access to EMS—not to provide services.

The network identifies, addresses, resolves, and monitors activities considered necessary for an improved EMS service delivery system. An initial project of the network was to facilitate a study of the EMS systems in Steuben and Livingston Counties of New York, which provided a better understanding of the situation and a foundation on which to plan needed activities. In an attempt to foster improvement within the emergency medical care continuum, the network facilitated the integration of the area emergency department and local paramedics. This supplied additional personnel to provide care in the emergency room and provided advanced training to the area paramedics. Another project initiated by the network was the placement of automatic external defibrillation units in county law enforcement vehicles and the training of deputies and troopers in their use. In an attempt to promote awareness and to improve recruitment, the network collaborated to develop and implement an Emergency Medical Services Youth Corps Project. This project is a collaborative effort between RHCS, schools that support the program, interested EMS agencies, and youth participants. The program is open to youth who are at least 14 years of age and exposes them to the world of EMS through fun and educational hands-on activities and meetings with participating volunteer ambulance corps to which they are assigned.

Making a Difference: While RHCS does not report any outcomes measures, they have established community-oriented goals. These include:

- Help youth become more involved in the community, giving them a sense of community service.
- Help EMS agencies in the county recruit and retain even more quality, dedicated, and knowledgeable volunteers.
- Assist schools in helping students' transition from a school environment to a work environment in today's highly complex work setting.
- Give youth a sense of pride in the EMS corps and its accomplishments, a direction for the future, and skills they can always use.

Beginnings: In the early 1990s, a study of primary care needs was done by the Health Systems Agency, which indicated the need for a closer examination of how emergency transportation was being handled in New York State. RHCS was originally organized in 1997 through grant funding of the state's Health Care Reform Act, which authorized over eight million dollars for the improvement of rural health access in New York State. Most of the projects that were initiated by the network are now "stand-alone."

Challenges and Solutions: As do many other community organizations, the network faces challenges with bureaucracy, poor communication, local

tradition, and culture. To address these, RHCS reaches its constituents and promotes its activities through the development and implementation of a media day, press releases, newsletters, a website, word of mouth, community/school presentations, and personal contact. To subsidize funding shortfalls, the network depends on its members to provide in-kind services and continuously canvases for additional support through membership connections.

RHCS received the New York State Department of Health Dr. Martin Luther King Healthy Community award. It was also chosen as an example of "best practice" by the National Rural Health Association EMS vision conference.

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