Poster 5: Education  
Rural Partnerships for Interprofessional Education in West Virginia

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To describe a state-supported program that engages health professions students in interprofessional education. Students from the West Virginia University Health Sciences Center programs partner with community and rural providers as they engage in community-based interprofessional activities.

West Virginia has rates of invasive cancer, heart disease, COPD, and diabetes that exceed the national norm. To begin to address these health needs, in 1995 the West Virginia legislature created the Rural Health Education Partnerships (RHEP), a collaborative network including higher education, rural providers, community-based site coordinators, and state government. Today RHEP consists of 8 regional consortia, 533 training sites, and 841 field faculty serving as preceptors.

Students from the schools of medicine, pharmacy, nursing, dentistry, physical therapy and allied health are required to participate in a rural health rotation. During these rotations, they provide direct care under the supervision of a rural practitioner, conduct community-based service learning projects, engage in interprofessional learning activities and live with students from all health professions. Interprofessional activities include case study analyses and seminars, participation in statewide health initiatives, and job shadowing.

Since 1999, over 1.2 million residents in West Virginia have been served by health professions students. In 2008, students completed 1259 rural rotations in underserved areas of West Virginia, equivalent to 7,794 weeks of training. Twenty percent of this time was devoted to community-based service learning, interprofessional activities, or translational research.

The West Virginia RHEP is a state-supported model designed to bring health professions students together outside of the limits of the traditional academic setting. In community-based practice and service activities, students have the opportunity to identify common goals and work together across professional boundaries to enhance their skills in interprofessional communication and collaboration.