

# RURAL MATTERS

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## THA Small or Rural Conference

Chief executive officers should mark their calendars and plan to attend the 10<sup>th</sup> annual THA Small or Rural Hospital Conference, which will be held March 20-21, 2003, at the Hilton Suites Downtown in Nashville.

Hotel reservations may be made by calling 615-620-1000. Program and registration information has been mailed to hospitals. For additional information, contact Bill Jolley at THA, 615-256-8240, [bjolley@tha.com](mailto:bjolley@tha.com).

## National Center for Rural Information Established

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has funded the establishment of a national information resource center, the Rural Assistance Center (RAC), for rural residents and others seeking information on health and human services for rural communities.

The RAC will serve as single point of entry for people across the country seeking rural health information. The RAC will provide rural communities, researchers, state policymakers and national organizations with assistance on a range of rural topics, including the complex web of federal programs serving rural America.

Based at the University of North Dakota Center for Rural Health, the RAC is the partnership of the University of North Dakota, Rural Policy Research Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, University of Missouri-Columbia and the Welfare Information Network, located in Washington, DC. The RAC can be accessed by calling 800-270-1898, e-mailing information requests to [info@raconline.org](mailto:info@raconline.org) or on the web at <http://www.raconline.org>.

## Federal Rulemaking Web Site Launched

As part of a continuing effort to bring access to the rulemaking process to the people, the Bush administration has unveiled a new web site, <http://www.regulations.gov>.

The new site is designed to make it easy for anyone with a computer and Internet access to find the status of every federal regulation open for public comment, read the proposed regulation, and file a comment on it to make their views heard.

More than 4,000 new rules a year are churned out by over 160 federal agencies implementing laws passed by congress. Historically, the rulemaking process has been dominated by special interest groups that have the resources to influence the process. The intent of this new site is to help level the playing field and allow equal access and an equal voice to the general public. The so-called e-rulemaking initiative is part of the

president's e-government strategy to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the federal government.

The new site is expected to be able to handle up to 2,000 users at a time and as many as 16,000 comments per hour. Users will be able to search by regulation title, agency or keyword. There is expected to be 400-500 regulations open for public comment at any one time.

### **New Study Shows Health Services at Risk in Vulnerable Rural Areas**

The Rural Policy Research Institute has released a study with a new methodology for identifying places in rural America that are at risk of being without adequate healthcare services.

Communities were classified as vulnerable according to this new method if they were census blocks located more than 25 miles from communities of at least 3,500 persons, or were places with high percentages of unemployed, elderly, minority, poor and uneducated residents.

Project researchers believe this new methodology can help a variety of policy makers, particularly those at the state level, target those communities that are most in need of assistance. The report is available online at [www.rupri.org/healthpolicy](http://www.rupri.org/healthpolicy).

### **Faith in Action Funding Opportunities Available**

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's national program, Faith in Action, offers one-time start-up grants of \$35,000 to establish programs that address some of the greatest needs of rural Americans with long-term health concerns.

Services provided by volunteers may include transportation to medical appointments, help with grocery shopping, respite care, home repairs and a friendly visitor on a regular basis. Volunteers usually come from a coalition of community congregations who work together to provide these basic services in support of the independence of those in need.

To learn more about this program, visit [www.FIAVolunteers.org](http://www.FIAVolunteers.org) or call the national office at 877-324-8411.

### **Beaumont Foundation Makes Computers Available Through Technology Grants**

The Beaumont Foundation of America (BFA) is a charity committed to improving the lives of individuals by providing a computer with Internet capability.

Its grants to individuals serve the most vulnerable populations living in the United States. They share a belief that giving people access to technology is important and has the potential to significantly change their lives.

In 2003, individuals will be selected on a non-renewable basis to receive the following equipment: Toshiba branded laptop computer, a printer, printer cable and mouse. A three-year SystemGuard with warranty on laptop and 24-hour telephone support is included. The computer comes equipped with Microsoft® Office XP software, including Microsoft Word®, Excel®, PowerPoint® and Outlook®. The computer will connect to the Internet, but you must purchase service from an Internet service provider.

Grant applications and supporting documentation will be accepted through March 31. All applicants will be notified whether or not they receive the grant by May 30. The equipment will be shipped in late September.

Individual applications are to be made by phone. The number is 866-505-COMP (ext.2667) or visit the web site, <http://www.bmtfoundation.com/grants>.