

RURAL MATTERS

Volume 4, No. 7

December 2003

Gann Becomes New THA Small or Rural Chairman

Jim Gann, administrator, Roane Medical Center, Harriman, is the new chairman of the THA small or rural hospital constituency section.

Gann became chairman during THA's recent annual meeting and will serve a two-year term.

Bill Gracey, president, national division, LifePoint Hospitals, Brentwood, is the section's vice-chairman. He will serve a two-year term before becoming chairman.

Mark Your Calendars

The THA small or rural hospital constituency section's spring conference will be held March 11-12 at the Sheraton Music City Hotel, Nashville. The conference brochure and program details will be available in the near future.

America's Healthcare Safety Net

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) and Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) are working together to monitor the nation's healthcare safety net.

America's healthcare safety net consists of a wide variety of providers delivering care to low-income and other vulnerable populations, including the uninsured and those covered by Medicaid. Many of these providers have either a legal mandate or an explicit policy to provide services regardless of a patient's ability to pay. Major safety net providers include public hospitals and community health centers, as well as teaching and community hospitals, private physicians and other providers who deliver a substantial amount of care to these patients. The nation's healthcare safety net was recently described by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) as "intact but endangered."

In response, AHRQ and HRSA are leading a joint safety net monitoring initiative. The goal is to help local policymakers, planners and analysts monitor the status of their local safety nets and the populations they serve. AHRQ and HRSA have developed two new data books that provide a broad range of measures for use in safety net monitoring.

The data books, a fact sheet, electronic data sets and documentation, and frequently asked questions are available at www.ahrq.gov/data/safetynet. The web site also includes the safety net profile tool, a user-friendly, online tool that allows users to create their own custom reports using data from the two books. With this tool, users can generate reports that compare multiple measures for one or more geographic areas.

For more information about this initiative, please visit the AHRQ web site or contact Robin Weinick, AHRQ center for delivery, organization and markets, safenet@ahrq.gov.

AHRQ to Award \$14 Million in Grants to Small, Rural Hospitals

HHS' Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality recently announced it is seeking applications for \$41 million in grants to plan, implement and demonstrate the value of health information technology (IT).

The announcement follows the release of an Institute of Medicine (IOM) study calling for a greater investment in health IT and the creation of a national health IT infrastructure to improve the quality and safety of patient care. The grant program includes \$14 million in new implementation grants to go to small and rural hospitals, \$7 million in planning grants to provide communities and organizations with the resources needed to develop their health IT infrastructure, and \$10 million in grants to demonstrate the clinical, organizational and/or financial value of health IT.

Eligible applicants include public and private nonprofit organizations such as hospitals and universities, for-profit organizations, faith-based organizations, and state and local government agencies. Letters of intent are due in March 2004. More information will be available soon at <http://www.ahrq.gov/whatsnew.htm>.

FCC Adjusts Universal Service Rural Healthcare Rules to Broaden Benefits

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has adopted new rules to improve the universal service program for rural healthcare providers.

The program helps rural healthcare providers obtain access to modern telecommunications and information services for medical and health maintenance purposes. The six-year-old program provides discounted telecommunications services to rural healthcare providers at rates equal to the rates charged for similar services in urban areas.

The FCC is seeking to increase participation in the rural healthcare support program, which is capped at \$400 million annually. Demand for funding year 2001 averaged \$14 million, or only 3.5 percent of the possible discounts.

For more information about the program, visit <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/rural>.

Upcoming National Conferences

- The 15th Annual Rural Health Policy Institute is scheduled for February 21-25 at the Grand Hyatt Hotel, Washington, DC. For more information, contact Eli Briggs at 703- 519-7910, briggs@NRHArural.org.
- The 27th annual National Rural Health Association conference is scheduled for May 27-29 at the Sheraton Harbour Island Hotel, San Diego, CA. For more information, contact Kathy Siress at 816-756-3140, sires@NRHArural.org.