



Rural Health Innovation Collaborative (RHIC) Launched

TERRE HAUTE, Ind. (December 2, 2008) – Neighborhood revitalization and economic development will be two of the positive results of a long-range plan involving Terre Haute government, education and business partners who are launching the Rural Health Innovation Collaborative as an aggressive response to current and anticipated health care worker shortages in Vigo County and surrounding rural communities.

Plans for the RHIC were announced at an 11 a.m. Dec. 2 news conference at the Landsbaum Center for Health Education, 1433 N. 6 ½ Street.

Union Hospital and its Lugar Center for Rural Health, Indiana University School of Medicine—Terre Haute, Indiana State University, Ivy Tech Community College, the Terre Haute Economic Development Corporation and the City of Terre Haute have joined forces to develop a program to create more health care training and job opportunities in the community. The progressive plan will encourage the expansion of health care businesses, create life science research opportunities, provide more health care training programs and ultimately improve access to medical care in the area.

The Rural Health Innovation Collaborative represents a unique opportunity to align the resources and strategic directions of several community institutions in Terre Haute to address a grand challenge – improving health care in rural Indiana. At the same time, the combined efforts will spawn neighborhood revitalization and economic development in the area near Union Hospital and ISU.

Mayor Duke Bennett has taken a leadership role in the project and shown enthusiastic support of this effort that includes three tiers of higher education in Terre Haute. "We applaud the continued growth of our local colleges and health-care industry, especially at a time when the entire U.S. is facing a shortage of physicians and other health-care workers," he said. "Obviously, other benefits of this collaboration will include possible neighborhood development, the creation of jobs and infrastructure improvements."

"The Rural Health Innovation Collaborative will have a significant impact on teaching, scholarship and public service at Indiana State University," said Daniel Bradley, president, Indiana State University. "The university is currently planning for a new or renovated facility that will allow the College of Nursing, Health, and Human Services to better prepare its graduates to meet changing health care needs,"

"Indiana State is already known for community engagement and experiential learning. By joining with our partners in founding this collaborative, ISU can strengthen long-standing community health outreach programs and properly plan new initiatives that will mean more real-world learning for our students while also addressing state, regional and national health care needs," he said.

President Bradley and leaders of the other higher education institutions involved in the RHIC are optimistic that the partnership will enhance lives of area residents in tangible and intangible ways.

"This innovative partnership has the potential to help meet the growing healthcare workforce needs in hospitals, clinics, physician practices and other settings, as well as improve access to care, especially in rural areas" said David R. Doerr, president and chief executive office of Union Hospital and its Richard G. Lugar Center for Rural Health. "Patients will benefit from this initiative for years to come."

Increasing the number of physicians graduating from the IU School of Medicine is important to the state as a whole but particularly important in areas with medically underserved populations such as the Terre Haute area.

“The IU School of Medicine – Terre Haute center has been proactive for several years in the national effort to increase the number of primary care practicing physicians and has been proactive in creating a rural medical program at the Terre Haute center to encourage graduates to return to the area after completing their training,” said Stephen B. Leapman, M.D., executive associate dean for educational affairs at the IU School of Medicine. “This collaborative will amplify the efforts of the medical school and produce a dynamic health professions educational environment with positive outcomes for the community. We are pleased to be a founding member of the RHIC.”

RHIC organizers agreed early in the planning process that health education opportunities were needed in all areas of care and that job opportunities and economic development were key to success of the project.

As one of the founding partners of the RHIC, Jeff L. Pittman, Ph.D., chancellor, Wabash Valley Region and vice provost for distance education, Ivy Tech Community College, said, "As one of the premier educators of health care and life science employees in the area, representatives of the college see the collaborative as an effective vehicle to better meet health-care employer needs and as a catalyst to expand health care and life science economic development initiatives here in the Wabash Valley."

Steve Witt, president of the Terre Haute EDC, summarized the sentiments of the group. "Whenever organizations of the caliber of ISU, IU School of Medicine, Ivy Tech, Union Hospital, the Terre Haute Economic Development Corporation and the city of Terre Haute work together to reach a common goal, great things are bound to happen," he said. "Twenty years from now, we will all look back on December 2, 2008, as being an historic day for our community."

Moving Forward

The RHIC Operations Committee is meeting monthly while five working groups focusing on finance, communications, education, economic development and facilities are also meeting regularly. The working groups will assist the operations committee in ensuring a coordinated implementation effort to move the RHIC forward to address the challenges of workforce shortages, economic development and neighborhood enhancement.

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