

EDITORIAL

October 24, 2011

The Power of Rural

We're approaching a first-time observance for the State of Kansas, and for me, this celebration is something that hits close to home. National Rural Health Day is November 17, and I'm part of the nearly one in three Kansans who have invested time and energy into the small towns and farming communities we know and love.

I think most will agree that these rural regions are the essence of Kansas. The selfless, community-minded spirit you'll see in Kansas and other places in rural America helps provide commodities and services to our nation and others.

Within these rural communities you will also find unique health care challenges surrounding access and capacity.

Prior to my appointment this year as the Secretary for Health and Environment and the State Health Officer, I practiced family medicine in western Kansas for more than 20 years with Greeley County Health Services. I've seen a great deal of innovation from health care providers in rural Kansas, and those efforts haven't slowed.

Rural communities have promising opportunities on the horizon to reshape the way health care services are delivered. Together, with other local, state and federal partners, rural Kansas can be a powerful force for assessing and addressing the health needs in all regions of the state. We're focused on expanding healthy behaviors; knitting together an improved, integrated health system; bringing quality doctors through the Smoky Hill Family Medicine Residency Program and planning better care management for the chronically ill.

We have a shortage of health care providers in many areas of Kansas, which is coinciding with the increased demands of an aging population suffering from chronic conditions and larger percentages of un- and underinsured citizens. Rural hospitals and health care providers struggle daily as pressures on funding make it challenging to serve their residents.

We're hopeful, however, because rural health systems are innovative, and the state of health care in Kansas is changing for the better. We're doing more to leverage our partnerships and craft programs to improve health outcomes.

On November 17, Kansas will join other states in celebrating National Rural Health Day and the Power of Rural. While we recognize the unique health care challenges facing Kansas' 89 rural counties, we reflect on the prevailing innovation, resilience and commitment to excellence demonstrated year after year. For more information about rural health care in Kansas and National Rural Health Day, visit our website: <http://www.kdheks.gov/olrh/ruralhealthday.htm>

We look forward to you joining the Kansas Department of Health and Environment on November 17 as we highlight the best of rural health. Take a moment to thank your rural health care provider!

Best regards to you and your family,

Robert Moser, MD
Secretary and State Health Officer
Kansas Department of Health and Environment