



Committed to promoting education and growing the local medical workforce, Northeastern Health System was awarded more than \$108,000 in renewal grant funding designated for the hospital's Area Health Education Center scholars program.

AHEC, a nation-wide grant program under the Health Resources and Services Administration, aims to develop and enhance education and training networks within communities, academic institutions, and community-based organizations while enhancing access to quality health care by improving supply and distribution of health care professionals.

"The program is three-fold," said Michele Horn, NHS clinical educator and AHEC director. "The Scholar Program provides multi-disciplinary health care students with training and stipends during the last two years of their training; the Pipeline Program is an outreach to high school students to encourage entry into a health care career; and the Continuing Education Program provides ongoing education for health care professionals."

HRSA designated most of Oklahoma's counties as primary care health professional shortage areas and in 2017, the Oklahoma Area Health Education Program was established to address these shortages. Based at Oklahoma State University, the OK-AHEC Program office collaborates with the AHEC centers to achieve the goals of the grant. NHS is one of the centers that covers 17 counties in northeast Oklahoma.

"Health care providers are in short supply, especially in primary care and in all disciplines in rural settings," Horn said. "The Scholar Program assists students financially while in school and provides evidence-based, nationally recognized training that gives the scholar the edge on providing patient-centered care that focuses on quality and safety. Then we go beyond that by supporting healthcare workers and providers with ongoing education which keeps them current."

To qualify for the AHEC Scholar Program, you must be accepted into a health care training program through a college, university or technical school; be expected to graduate within two years; and maintain a 2.5 grade point average.

NHS is currently taking applications year-round and once accepted into the Scholar Program, the student will complete the curriculum through a variety of didactic and experiential hours. The Core Topics of training include Cultural Competency, Social Determinants of Health, Behavioral Health Integration, Practice Transformation, Current and Emerging Health Issues, and Inter-professional Education.

NHS also recently collaborated with Connors State College on their career ladder program for licensed practical nurses to become registered nurses.

"The nursing shortage is a nationwide issue and this program can help bring more students into the community to help better care for our patients while also encouraging LPNs to further their education," Horn said.

Horn said that Connors will provide the LPNs tuition waivers for 15 credit hours of the general education requirements and NHS can assist with covering additional costs through the Tahlequah Hospital Foundation Scholarship. Once accepted into the program, NHS may also provide an additional \$10,000 career ladder incentive.

For more information on the career ladder program, email NHS Recruiter Sharee Maggard at [recruiter@nhs-ok.org](mailto:recruiter@nhs-ok.org) or visit [www.connorstate.edu/nursing/career-ladder](http://www.connorstate.edu/nursing/career-ladder).

For more information on the AHEC grant, contact Horn at 918-229-1476 or email [mhorn@nhs-ok.org](mailto:mhorn@nhs-ok.org). Applications are also available on the NHS website at [www.alwaysnhs.org](http://www.alwaysnhs.org).

1400 East Downing • P.O. Box 1008 • Tahlequah, OK 74465-1008 • (918) 456-0641