

Northeastern Health System Receives Grant to Increase Healthcare Worker Recruitment and Training

TAHLEQUAH, Oklahoma – Northeastern Health System (NHS) in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, recently received the OSU Area Health Education Center (AHEC) grant. This government-funded grant prepares underrepresented minority and disadvantaged youth for healthcare careers, promotes clinical training opportunities for students, and provides continuing education programs for health professionals.

“Because of the grant, we are able to provide training to healthcare students participating in the Scholar Program,” said Michele Horn, BSN, RN, CEN, and director of the AHEC grant at NHS. “The scholars also receive financial stipends as they progress through the two-year program. These benefits help students get through their school program and help them be optimally prepared to enter the workforce. Additionally, we are able to provide continuing education to local providers.”

NHS joined the AHEC program in 2019. Since that time, they have implemented many new programs and opened new training facilities.

“Through the AHEC Scholar Program we provide additional training to healthcare students regarding team-based and patient-centered care, performance improvement in practice, cultural competency, social determinants of health, behavioral health integration, and current and emerging health care issues,” said Horn. “At NHS, we have been able to expand our simulation lab, and we have been able to introduce students to a variety of both inpatient and outpatient healthcare situations.”

For many years rural areas have been underserved in the area of healthcare. The AHEC grant has a goal to combat this issue through the development of a pipeline to high school students.

“We want to encourage our younger generations to consider a career in healthcare and help them reach those goals,” said Horn. “It can provide job security for them, and recruiting from within the

community will assure that our healthcare workers will be able to connect culturally, and have a vested interest in safe and optimal outcomes in the healthcare of the northeast Oklahoma community.”

AHEC’s goal of developing a pipeline to high school students has proven difficult during the COVID pandemic. NHS plans to use this year’s funding to enhance these efforts during this time of virtual learning and social distancing.

“We plan to develop a program of outreach to local ninth through twelfth grade students. The Scholar Program will expand to include telehealth and resiliency training,” said Horn. “We have been able to expand clinical opportunities to healthcare schools during a time when many facilities are restricting student access.”

Applications for the Scholar Program at NHS are accepted year-round and can be obtained by visiting www.alwaysnhs.org. The program is open to multi-disciplinary students, including, but not limited to, nursing, medical, pharmacy, occupational and physical therapy, radiology technology, and psychology counseling. For further information, interested parties may call the Education department at Northeastern Health System at (918) 456-0641.

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