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**SYMPOSIUM ADDRESSES FUTURE FOR AREA'S
HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE**

Hampton, VA (June 23, 2010) - In March, President Barack Obama signed the comprehensive health reform, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, into law. This law will greatly increase the number of people who will be covered by insurance or will be able participate in a healthcare insurance exchange program, which in turn will drive up the demand for services.

To better prepare the region for this increased demand, the Peninsula Council for Workforce Development sponsored a symposium June 22 titled "The Future of the Healthcare Workforce — Assessing the Impact of the Economic Recession and Healthcare Reform."

More than 50 healthcare professionals, partners and providers attended the event at Thomas Nelson Community College, which was sponsored in part by TNCC, Sentara Health Care, Riverside Health System, Bon Secours Health System, Eastern Virginia Medical School, and the Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association.

The symposium marks the inaugural meeting of the Council's revitalized Healthcare Cluster, now known as the Greater Peninsula Healthcare Workforce Partnership. The Council recently assumed the leadership role of the Partnership, which was established in fall 2007, to help strengthen workforce development opportunities for those seeking healthcare careers.

“Like first responders in a disaster area, we want to set up our tent before the tidal wave of healthcare reform hits shore,” said Donna Dittman Hale, the Council's health care workforce coordinator. “We need to determine what strategies we need to work on to prepare for the future. So we assembled a vast amount of expertise for this symposium to talk about what the recession has done and what the new reform is expected to do.”

One of the problems the symposium addressed was the need for certification programs for medics who leave the military and settle in the area. “Hampton has the highest percentage of vets in the country, with Newport News coming in fourth,” Hale said. “Many are medics who have training but no certification in any healthcare program. Regionally, we have programs that could be adapted for them. And we have state and federal support to pay for these programs but it takes partnerships to help these medics become healthcare workers.”

Highlights of meeting

After a light breakfast and welcoming address, Barbara Brown, workforce specialist and vice president of the Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association, assessed the overall impact of healthcare reform and addressed how alternative providers, such as physician assistants and nurse practitioners, will play a greater role in healthcare.

“Soon, there will be double-digit increases in Medicaid beneficiaries,” she noted. And the industry needs to be prepared to handle this surge of patients due to projected shortages of primary care physicians.

In addition to the industry’s shortage components, Brown addressed what roles providers should play to help remedy the situation and how students should be encouraged to take up certain fields of study. Besides the increased demand for healthcare, she pointed out that new technological advances also attributed to the industry’s growing need for a larger workforce.

Following Brown’s talk, Kathy Wibberly, director of the Virginia Department of Health’s Division of Primary Care and Rural Health and coordinator of the Health Workforce Advisory Committee, spoke about statewide initiatives that were being developed to address current and future healthcare workforce needs.

The symposium ended with a lively panel discussion that outlined the region’s most critical needs now and in the future. It also looked at ways localities, businesses and organizations could collaborate to form solutions for these needs.

For more information on the PCFWD and its healthcare initiatives, contact Shawn Avery at (757) 826-3327 or savery@pcfwd.org.

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