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UNE-BASED MAINE AHEC NETWORK ADDS 2 NEW CENTERS

BIDDEFORD—Improved access to health care for Maine’s rural and other medically underserved communities is the goal of the recently expanded Maine Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Network. The partnership program, administered by the Office of Community Programs in the College of Osteopathic Medicine at the University of New England, this fall opened two new AHEC Centers in Farmington and Augusta.

The new AHEC Centers at the Franklin Community Health Network and the Maine Center for Public Health join the existing Acadia Coalition AHEC, which reaches into rural northern and downeast Maine.

The Franklin Community Health Network is an innovative rural health-care system that brings to the Maine AHEC Network expanded capacity for health professions training and continuing education. FCHN’s newly opened, state-of-the-art health education center—the Ben Franklin Center—offers a wide range of distance-learning resources.

The Maine Center for Public Health is an organization with statewide reach that brings to the Maine AHEC Network crucial public health knowledge and research capacity. In addition, it offers expanded resources for training Maine’s public health professionals and for the integration of public health into the training of primary care clinicians.

“We’re really thrilled that the Maine AHEC Network is growing,” said Meredith Tipton, M.P.H., Ph.D., UNECOM associate dean for community programs, and director of the Maine AHEC Network. “To ensure that all Maine residents have access to quality health care, we must make increasing the supply of health care professionals a top priority. While Maine’s aging population places ever-greater demands on the health-care system, fewer young adults in Maine are entering into health professions than the number of health professionals who are leaving. AHEC is an important part of the solution.”

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The University of New England created the AHEC system in 1989 to improve the recruitment, training and retention of health professionals throughout rural areas of the state. Today, the Maine AHEC Network helps train health professionals for the communities that need them the most, provides these professionals with continuing education and professional support, and encourages Maine youth—especially from rural and disadvantaged backgrounds—to pursue health careers.

The Maine AHEC Network is partially supported by grants from the Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and from the Finance Authority of Maine. The University and its AHEC partners also fund its operations.

Since the creation of the Maine AHEC system 15 years ago, more than 1,400 medical students and more than 500 physician assistant students have received clinical education at community-based training sites across the state. Over the same period, more than 25,000 Maine health-care providers have attended continuing education programs co-sponsored by the Maine AHEC Network in all parts of the state. Since 2003, “Great Hospital Adventure” presentations have reach more than 2,000 elementary school children in Maine. During the summers of 2003 and 2004, more than 300 youths received exposure to health careers and health professionals through week-long camps.

The College of Osteopathic Medicine is Maine’s only medical school and emphasizes the education of primary care physicians. The medical school also offers a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study in Public Health and an online Master of Public Health degree. Through its medical school and its College of Health Professions, the University of New England educates more Maine students to become health professionals than any other college or university. These health professionals include physician assistants, nurse anesthetists, social workers, physical therapists, occupational therapists, nurses, and dental hygienists.

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