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## NSU-Muskogee to host health care summit

The Eastern Regional Health Care Coalition and the Oklahoma Health Care Workforce Center have joined to sponsor a one day Health Care Workforce Summit at Northeastern State University-Muskogee on September 23, 2010. Contributing sponsors for the summit include Bacone College, Connors State College, Eastern Workforce Investment Board, Indian Capital Technology Center, Northeastern State University, Oklahoma Health Care Workforce Center and Tahlequah City Hospital.

Addressing workforce shortages in Eastern Oklahoma, the Eastern Regional Health Care Coalition was formed in 2006 as a partnership of public and private educational institutions, health care providers and tribal entities.

The summit will host senior level decision makers from a diverse group of health care providers, educational institutions within the region and state and the leadership of the American Indian populations served within 14 counties in Eastern Oklahoma.

The intent of the event is to use regional health care workforce data to validate and prioritize health care workforce shortage issues in the region, establish collaborative remedies to address the shortages and define commitment to a five-year implementation plan to address the identified needs.

"As health care continues to consolidate and revenue and funding sources become more limited, it's important that we all look for ways to become more efficient and collaborate our efforts to best serve the patient population," said Mark Roberts, president of Muskogee Community Hospital. "This forum puts everyone in the same room to accomplish those needs."

In 2009, a health care workforce supply/demand gap analysis was conducted and indicated that the impact of shortages in Eastern Oklahoma will be significantly drastic, unless the Coalition collectively can find a way to bring the educational capacity for high priority health care areas to the Eastern Region.

The projected shortage in Oklahoma is more than 3,000 nurses, 600 laboratory technicians, 400 physical therapists, 300 surgical technologists and 200 occupational therapists by 2012.

Dr. Donnie Nero, president of Connors State College, believes that educators and providers of health care must become proactive and visionary in meeting the demand and shortage of qualified workers.

"As educators, we must investigate and explore different ways of doing business," said Nero. "If we fail to fulfill the educational requirements needed to address these vacancies, providers will seek other resources and options. Instead of doing things right, we have to begin doing the right things to alleviate this crisis. The bottom line is--we need to re-tool our programs and curricula."

The summit is by invitation only, and registration is open until September 15. For more information, contact Shayla Austin, project coordinator for the Oklahoma Health Care Workforce Center, at (405) 319-8690.

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