

Alabama rural health champions to be recognized

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In celebration of Gov. Bob Riley's proclamation of the week of Oct. 26 through Nov. 1 as Rural Health Week in Alabama, the Alabama Rural Health Association is recognizing two of Alabama's rural health champions.

Dr. Richard O. Rutland, Jr. of Fayette (Fayette County) will be presented with the Rural Health Provider Exceptional Achievement Award. Dr. Rutland is completing his 51st year in the practice of medicine. He was instrumental in the development of the College of Community Health Sciences at the University of Alabama and in 1981 was recognized as the "Family Doctor of the Year" in the United States by *Good Housekeeping* magazine and the American Academy of Family Physicians.

Dr. Rutland has twice traveled to rural communities which did not have physicians and started clinics for those residents who were not able to travel great distances for health care. When Dr. Rutland closed his office practice in 1997, he immediately took over the responsibilities as medical director for the Fayette Medical Center's 122-patient nursing home and is now also serving as physician for the only nursing home in Lamar County.

Marjory C. Johnson of Shorter (Macon County) will be presented with the Rural Volunteer Excellence in Service Award. Ms. Johnson has served as a leader in the Women Involved in Farm Economics (WIFE) organization for years.

Mrs. Johnson and other WIFE members participated in meetings that were part of the Alabama Rural Health Association's report to the Legislature in 1989 emphasizing that rural health care in Alabama was an unmet need. They have worked extensively with the Rural Pipeline Programs at the University of Alabama, the Rural Alabama Health Alliance, and others to create and support rural scholars programs to recruit and nurture rural students who want to become rural physicians or other rural health care practitioners.

With Ms. Johnson's guidance, WIFE has provided rural field trip experiences and community service experiences for participants in the rural scholars programs and have assisted in other rural health projects seeking to improve health care services in rural underserved areas.

Recognition will be made at the second Alabama Rural Health Association recognition luncheon that will be held at the Farmer's Market Café, 315 N. McDonough St. in Montgomery on Friday, Oct. 31 starting at noon. Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, Alabama Department of Public Health, will present the awards. Glenn C. Sisk, administrator of Coosa Valley Baptist Medical Center in Sylacauga, will serve as the luncheon speaker.

Reservations are not required and the public is invited.

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