



## **NEWS RELEASE**

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## **Support Alabama's rural health care industry**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Alabama's rural health care industry is being challenged in assuring that quality health care is available to meet the needs of its vulnerable rural residents. When compared to residents of urban areas, Alabama's rural residents tend to be older, have higher percentages of disabled persons, have less formal education, have greater racial diversity, have lower income, experience greater unemployment, and have greater transportation limitation. These characteristics bring an increase in health care needs.

"Assuring that enough health care practitioners bypass the social attractions of urban life to practice in rural areas is one of the greatest challenges that rural health is facing today," said Dale Quinney, program manager of the Alabama Rural Health Association. "Compared to their urban counterparts, primary care physicians practicing in rural Alabama have approximately twice the number of potential patients."

However, the single greatest challenge to Alabama's rural health care industry may be from the people that it exists to serve. Many rural residents fall victim to the belief that higher quality health care can be received in urban areas.

Dr. Wayne Myers, president of the National Rural Health Association, recently stated that rural medical practice requires a much broader range of skills than urban practice where specialists are abundant. Studies of medical errors show that mistakes are less likely to happen when information does not have to move from person to person. The care that a person will receive from a rural practitioner can be as good as one could receive anywhere.

Dr. Myers points out another very important benefit from using local health care providers. By keeping health care dollars near home, rural residents are helping to keep a local health care system which will be there for emergencies as well as routine situations. They are helping to maintain local jobs and to assure community vitality by having health care dollars spent and then re-spent locally.

The Alabama Department of Public Health, Office of Primary Care and Rural Health, joins the Alabama Rural Health Association in expressing appreciation to Alabama's excellent rural health care industry.

11/4/03