Good afternoon and thanks for joining us; I'm Judy Simpson. Our focus this afternoon is on the “Area Health Education Centers Program” at the University of Vermont College of Medicine. The Area Health Education Centers are also known as AHECS (A-hecks) … [guest] and joining me is the Director the AHEC program at UVM, Denis Barton. Thanks for being with us.

Denis: Thank you Judy.

Judy: Maybe you can explain what AHEC is and where are you located?

Denis: AHECs are Area Health Education Centers. In Vermont we have a network of centers with a program office. Our three centers are located regionally, one is in Saint Johnbury one in Springfield and another in Saint Albans but they serve the whole state and various regions. We also have a program office and that is where our work. Which is the office of primary care program office for the health education centers. Together we are a network. We are network of partner some work together to improve Health Care access.

Judy.: One of the goals of AHECs?

Denis: We are part of a national program. The area health education centers program have been around for many years. It was originally developed to try to respond to the needs of developing an appropriate adequate Health Care work force in every state especially in areas where there’s an under service area one terms of the number of providers for the population to have access to Health Care.

Judy.: What services to the AHECs program provide?

Denis: We provide an awful lot of services and I knew I couldn't get these on a graphic but I think I can talk while some things highlight of the screen. I looked at it from our point of view that a continuum. Really if you look of some of these Health Care careers which it won't be able to do this and kids students earlier their lives with the thought or possibility of participating in some kind of healthcare career in their life. As you know many young children might have aspirations to be a Dr. or nurse but we know there's many different kinds of Health Care professionals and health careers especially in this changing healthcare environment. The ideas about healthcare information technology all those new demands created all kinds of new health professions for people to be engaged with. So we start there we work with elementary school students Rupert with high school students we do career exploration
activities like career fairs. With a summer camp with kids that are very seriously interested in the kind of career that if they make those choices we also work them through undergraduate and graduate schools so a large part of our emphasis is that once you've chosen this career path of education how can we help you pursue that. In medical school we work with that of the students up the college of medicine. I think a big emphasis is how do we get the more engaged in thinking about becoming part of the primary care work force and we can talk more about the but it's the emphasis that the AHECs have is that we need adequate access to Health Care in our commuters and much of that is really primary care. We can talk about how we can promote that a little bit more but that's important.

Judy.: I think that's one of the things you do you collect data and that's how you know this is what's new.

Dennis.: This and all talk a little bit this is one of our publications it's a primary care work force report that we do on an annual basis. I think it's helpful to analyze where we stand and state in terms of doctors and other health professions. I should highlight briefly once they get out of graduate school I want to talk about that. Once they get out of graduate school we try to expose them to working in various community settings but I think it's important to realize that even when they start to practice we're very much involved in recruiting them to practice in Vermont but we also provide many continuing education programs that help practitioners in their community use to work with their population and improve quality. It's an ongoing long term relationship that AHEC develops with individual Health Care careers in terms of the state and trying to support them and what the state wants to do in terms of the quality and Health Care.

Judy.: So really it's a support network not only for providers but also for everyone who uses providers in the state.

Dennis.: Absolutely.

Judy.: How important is that comprehensive support from maybe our young student who's interested in medicine all the way up until through their academic career and beyond?

Dennis.: I think with all of us we're trying to choose careers in our life. I think we all need some coaching prompting and some support. We can develop the relationship and we can say this is a path you can take and we're going to help you understand what the experience can be like to work and health and then they can make their own decisions in terms of what's attractive and what's going to work for them in terms of their long term career. So that support I think is very helpful in terms of their work.

Judy.: A big obstacle for many people were some people getting into medical career might be funding to pay for.

Dennis.: Yes there are programs nationally called the National Health Service core which provide homes and in some cases scholarships for students to one of pursue a medical career but there's always an obligation in terms of they have to work and underserved areas we have a scholarship programs in the past and though still exist but I think our primary emphasis right now is for those individuals who do have hired at who do need some financial assistance with the debt we have an educational loan repayment program that works to help pay off the debt in return for their willingness to provide service in underserved areas and communities in Vermont. It is a Vermont specific program.

Judy.: So what would happen without the loan repayment program do you think?
Dennis.: This program has been supported by state governments for a long-term by the state legislature and the governor. I think the impact would be this if you have a high debt coming out of medical school or dental school for example we've seen in our last cycle for dentists we've seen that this is cumulative debt both college and their dental training we've seen in the highs of $100,000. I think their choices relate to that in terms of where can they practice where they can make sufficient and have enough money and income to support that load that they have. We believe that if we help them with their educational repayment they will be willing to serve an area and Vermont where the income level may not be as high. As an area say outside of the Boston area where it's a very high very big population and you can have higher salaries. Smaller communities here where we have just as much need but the salaries will compensate education loan repayment help pick up the difference.

Judy.: You mentioned dentists their combined with Physicians why the emphasis on dentists?

Dennis.: We have found and I think from health and other folks in the Health Care world have found that giving access to a dentist’s is becoming more and more of a challenge for adults. This a lot of factors and there’s a lot of reasons for that but if you talk to people in communities and around the state for example district offices for the health and they'll say the demand for dentistry is how I have access to dentistry is more challenging in some areas. We also believe that the two strangers like behavioral health mental health abuse counseling is really just another primary Care Service. It's just like Medical Health the primary care is inclusive to dental care is inclusive of Medical Care and inclusive on behavioral Health Care so that's why it's important to us. Oral health influences Medical Health and behavioral health influences Medical Health. So you really have to make sure there's access to all the care to ensure that patients are getting the right care of the state of Vermont.

Judy.: Who are the AHECs partners?

Denis.: We have many partners with good support from the state of Vermont we of grants in the state health department we also have very good support from the Federal gov't Health Resources Services administration of fund our infrastructure. We have partners with hospitals. Hospitals or donate to are programs we also tried to work with them in terms of getting locations for students internships and residencies and their very helpful. Other partners include federally qualified Health Care Centers. We're very interested in making sure they have an adequate Health Care work force in the centers because there are in our service areas. They in turn are interested in exposing and helping students understand what it's like to practice in those settings it's usually not something that people think about necessarily when they go into medical school. We love to give them that exposure and we found if they get that experience that sometimes really enjoyed working in those communities and being a family Dr. Which is part of what some people like to do in terms of the relationships with their patients.

Judy.: Yes absolutely. You have some additional activities to highlight for our viewers?

Dennis.: Sure. I think this will come upstream from pointed out this is the health careers catalog and the health careers catalog is basically with about every two years and it's also on the web and we update it. It's over 50 Health Care careers that are available that people can look at inside this catalog and say what's the environment? how to get training? what's the Job? what are the salaries? What kind of choices can I make in the areas that I might be interested in? I think we like it because it includes basic kinds of services in areas like traditional doctors nurses pharmacists that it also includes other areas that sometimes people might not have thought about like a respiratory therapists. We give this to school counselors we give this to students who give this to community agencies and it's available online. That's one publication we do every two years. The publication we mentioned earlier is the Vermont to primary care work force. It's a snapshot and by snapshot we mean what is the situation what are the
circumstances in Vermont terms of primary care practitioners that we have. I think a pointed out a little earlier that to primary care could include Physicians it could include nurse practitioners Physician assistants psychiatrists even provide primary care. What it tells us is that where's the supply. Over all Vermont has a pretty good supply of Physicians and primary care if you look locally it's not distributed in the way we'd like to see a distributed in terms of access to the population.

Judy.: What other things to find out the latest report besides that information?

Dennis.: We found out that we still have an aging work force a Health Care work force. I think that's a major thing Concern I think retirements and changes in the Healthcare System I think we're concerned about that. I think the trend has been that we're holding our own overall in terms of distribution but I think a major shortage his primary care access for adults. We're finding that we don't have as many in internal medicine Physicians that we've had in the past and we're seeing there's a shortage in the area. Family medicine to pretty good shape pediatrics are in pretty good shape but internal medicine and access for adults is probably the major concern and I think that plates to the aging work force and the aging population.

Judy.: You talked about support for students at the high school level to get involved in Health Care. What about people who were changing careers or thinking about a career change.

Dennis.: Yes they should consider that and just our area health education centers are very much interested in talking to them and they can have access to these publications. They can talk to the carrier health education centers in their region and there's many opportunities for individuals concerned about what they're doing now and what to do something else and have always thought they might get involved in Health Care and there are opportunities and we provide support and assistance in that area.

Judy.: You have an upcoming event that you want to mention.

Dennis.: Yes as I mentioned earlier we provide a lot of medical education programs syndication. We do some of that at the practice level so we go out and visit primary care Physicians and provide academic detailing programs which is really education programs focused on specific problem areas that we can help Physician practices with the we also have statewide conferences and we have the behavioral health primary care conference but the conference is coming up April 17 is the geriatric conference. This is focused on Medical Care providers so everybody who's working aging population in terms of Health Care this is focused on them. The topics are interesting. Technology innovations for aging services. Some lot of technology being used them to help deliver better care to our seniors in Home Technology. We're having an interesting program elder vestment fraud and Financial exploitation. What's going on the people of that age may be exploited in terms of finances and ultimately we have to have that concern with patient populations. Poly pharmacy and the elderly sys been an issue for a long-term by many of us know that many elderly patients have many medication and really the interactions interactive issues are very much a concern. One of the programs that day might beat poly pharmacy and what are the concerns what are the issues were that needs we need to address in that population.

Judy.: Because the population many times will have more than one caregiver?

Dennis.: Yes.

Judy.: So it's coordinating that information I would imagine that would be huge as well?
Dennis.: Yes all the care givers need to have access and understand what the medications are in the state has tried to centralize the pharmacy record so everybody has better access to all the medications and has a better sense of what those interactions might be and how that might influence their patients and patient behavior to their path to recovery.

Judy.: What to think has been the biggest change that you have seen as far as the Health Care community in Vermont?

In the time that I have been involved in the healthcare UV of Vermont I think there's a recognition of integrated care as being very very important multidisciplinary care so we do one of bring pharmacists and the decision-making process about patient care. We do want the care givers to the process. Want to bring patient to the process of the decision-making so I think that's been significant change over time and health information technology. Introduced health information technology a think it's been a challenge also an opportunity. We need to have good information flow everybody needs to know what's going on their patients and we need to be able to measure our progress dealing with individual patients but also doing populations of patient and I think that has been quite a change.

Judy.: How can viewers find out more about AHECs?

Dennis.: Upon the screen is our website vtAHEC.org you can go to the website and you can then link to our regional centers. Each of them has their own web site. We also have another web site called Vermont’s health careers that's linked so you can look at some of career so we've talked about here. There's a telephone number that we can be reached and were just available for any kinds of calls referrals or whenever it is that we can help people explore and make sure we have people involved in the Health Care careers in the state of Vermont.

Judy.: Dennis thank you very much.

Dennis.: You're welcome Judy.

Judy: That’s our program for today. I’m Judy Simpson we’ll see you again next time on Across the Fence.

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