

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

April 24, 2014

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Home Town Heroes – Working Hard to Protect the Public’s Health

(Coldwater, MI) There are lots of examples of heroes in our culture, some fictitious, others very real. Most of us would agree Superman is a hero, and so is a firefighter who charges into a burning building. Heroes take action on behalf of others and public health hometown heroes take action to make their communities healthier, safer places to live. This year, the Michigan Department of Community Health has recognized the Community Health Center’s School Tele-health Project Partners as Hometown Heroes during its Public Health Week celebration, held at the Capitol Rotunda on April 23rd.

Randy DeGroot, CEO of the Community Health Center of Branch County, Joseph Lopez, Branch County ISD Superintendent, Steve Todd, Health Officer, Branch –Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, Tina Kerr, Superintendent, Coldwater Community Schools, Jim Modert, Superintendent, Bronson Community Schools and Craig Artist, Superintendent, Quincy Community Schools were among the list of honorees that were awarded the Hometown Hero Award. The CHC School Tele-health project, which received a transformational healthcare delivery model grant from the Michigan Department of Community Health last summer, can trace its genesis back to 2010 when Joe Lopez approached the health department to develop a school nursing model. Steve Todd remembers “The problem was creating an affordable model that would address health care access for students in a rural community that lacked health professionals.” Tele-health technology addressed both concerns. First, as tele-health technology has become more widely used, it has become more affordable and, with the expansion of the internet, more readily available. It also allows practitioners (i.e., physicians and nurse practitioners) the ability to see patients within the school setting

without having to leave their practice location. A win-win-win for students and their families, for schools and for the healthcare system that serve them.

Steve Todd continues “While the idea was born back in 2010, we had to wait for the right funding opportunity to pull together the project. The state health department provided that opportunity when it funded the project. But the real heroes are the project partners – the Community Health Center and each of the county’s school superintendents – who have worked diligently to open the clinics and continuously strive to provide quality care to those who utilize them. ”

Within six short months, CHC opened two school-based tele-health clinics in Coldwater and Bronson schools for students 6th through 12th grades and now have seen over 300 students. Kristin Smith, CHC RN and grant coordinator, stated, “I’m grateful for this opportunity to have an expanded model of healthcare back into the schools. Tele-health has provided us not only with a link to a CHC Pediatric and Adolescent Center provider, but a chance for students to be seen who may not normally seek healthcare.” Kristin Smith added, “A few of the visits that stand out to me are ones where irregular heartbeats were detected via tele-health and then referred for more detailed assessment. This speaks to the quality of the tele-health system. Lastly, if we can take the medical burden off of school employees so that they can focus on students, we’ve made a significant difference.”

Services include:

- Primary care services via tele-health to CHC Pediatric and Adolescent Center;
- Care for acute illness and minor injuries such as strep throat, ear infections, rash, and influenza;
- Preventative care such as immunizations; and
- Insurance enrollment assistance for adolescents who are uninsured or underinsured.

“The Community Health Center of Branch County is pleased to be a part of this project. We have long known the need for healthcare services in the schools, and tele-

health enabled us to help serve that need,” noted Randy DeGroot, CHC President and CEO. CHC has provided oversight of the clinics and employs the registered nurses in Coldwater and Bronson. CHC is the fiduciary for the project and does all the reporting for the grant. The CHC Foundation has also been active in raising funds in hopes of expanding the project.

Future plans seek to expand services into Quincy middle and high schools. This three year grant funding provides assistance with infrastructure development and implementation. It also allows the partnership time to more fully understand student needs so that it can develop long-term plans to sustain the project. Applying innovative models to address long term, healthcare access problems within a short period of time, has taken some heroic efforts. The CHC Tele-health Partnership and their staff are the hometown heroes who have made it happen!

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From left to right: Sen. Bruce Caswell, Kristin Smith, Dir. of Patient Experience, Community Health Center of Branch County, Steve Todd, Health Officer, Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, Joseph Lopez, Superintendent, Branch County ISD, Tina Kerr, Superintendent, Coldwater Community Schools, Rep. Ken Kurtz, and James Haveman, Director, Michigan Department of Community Health.