SWØSU
Southwestern Oklahoma State University

News

11 March, 2022

SWOSU Awarded $1 Million from the USDA to Implement Telemedicine and Telehealth for Rural Oklahoma

There was a large celebration as the Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU) College of Pharmacy Rural Health Center (RHC) in Weatherford has been awarded a $1 million grant to buy equipment to implement telemedicine in LeFlore County western Oklahoma counties over the next three years. The grant is through the United States Department of Agriculture. The award was made on March 11 at a luncheon on the SWOSU campus with U.S. Representative Frank Lucas (back row second from left) on hand to make the presentation.

Through a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture, the Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU) College of Pharmacy Rural Health Center (RHC) in Weatherford has been awarded a $1 million grant to buy equipment to implement telemedicine in LeFlore County and western Oklahoma counties over the next three years.

The award was made March 11 at a luncheon on the SWOSU campus with U.S. Representative Frank Lucas on hand to make the presentation.

Dr. Randy Curry, director of the RHC, said in the first year of the grant, SWOSU is collaborating with Eastern Oklahoma Memorial Center (EOMC) in Poteau (LeFlore County) by putting telemedicine equipment in six rural public-school locations in LeFlore County. The use of telemedicine equipment to provide medical services to schoolchildren and faculty in rural communities will be instrumental in improving healthcare concerns in the rural setting.

The total population of the towns that are being served is over 15,000 people with 2,500 students. They include Bokoshe, Cameron, Hodgen, Monroe, Panama and Whitesboro.

"Bridging the digital divide isn't just convenient for our communities—it's necessary if we're going to ensure our rural neighbors have the same access to health care, learning opportunities, and economic growth as our suburban neighbors. As Congress and federal agencies like USDA continue to invest in rural America, it's programs like USDA's Rural Development Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant program that are critically important to expanding medical and educational access across our communities," said U.S. Congressman Frank Lucas. "I'm proud to join Southwestern Oklahoma State University in announcing a $1 million grant that will help students in our state's schools tap into the enormous potential of modern telemedicine tools and expand upon the endless teaching opportunities for those going into healthcare. I applaud the leadership of Dr. Diana Lovell and Dr. Randy Curry at SWOSU and the SWOSU Center for Rural Health, and I look forward to continuing to support and advocate for the bridging of America's digital divide."

SWOSU will also have telemedicine equipment on the Weatherford campus in the School of Nursing, College of Pharmacy and the Health & Wellness Department to provide student training and opportunities. Through the purchase of telemedicine equipment, SWOSU will expand its resources to serve more students and communities, helping to reduce the shortage of healthcare providers in rural areas and provide the university's Diabetes Prevention Program to the state of Oklahoma. This equipment will allow the Health & Wellness Department to provide telehealth visits with medical providers and opportunities for training with SWOSU students.

In the second and third years of the grant, SWOSU's goal is to serve 18 rural schools in western Oklahoma counties. The total population of the towns that are being served is over 50,000 people with over 12,000 students. The towns include: Arapaho, Arnett, Burns Flat, Cheyenne, Clinton, Cordell, Elk City, Erick, Fargo, Hydro, Reydon, Sayre, Shattuck, Sweetwater, Taloga, Thomas, Vici and Weatherford.

"SWOSU looks forward to bringing telemedicine/telehealth resources to Oklahoma's rural communities," said SWOSU President Dr. Diana Lovell. "The university is so appreciative of this amazing grant that will assist our SWOSU College of Pharmacy Rural Health Center."