

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Health Resources and Services Administration

HRSA-03-101 Fiscal Year 2003 Competitive Application Cycle for the Comprehensive Geriatrics Education Program (CGEP)

AGENCY: Health Resources and Services Administration, HHS.

ACTION: Correction of deadline date.

SUMMARY: In notice document FR Doc. 03-13225, in the issue of Wednesday, May 28, 2003, make the following correction:

On page 31722, under the section "Application Requests, Availability, Dates and Addresses:", in the third column, lines 23 and 24, the language "applications must be postmarked by the due date of July 7, 2003. Applicants" is corrected to read "applications must be postmarked by the due date of June 30, 2003. Applicants".

Dated: May 28, 2003.

Jane M. Harrison,

Director, Division of Policy Review and Coordination.

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Health Resources and Services Administration

[Announcement Number: HRSA-03-094]

Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility Program Evaluation Cooperative Agreement

AGENCY: Health Resources and Services Administration, HHS.

ACTION: Notice of availability of funds.

SUMMARY: The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) announces the availability of up to \$1 million in fiscal year 2003 to fund a single competitive cooperative agreement to support the continuing evaluation of the Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility grant program (Flex). The evaluation project will continue to assess the effectiveness of implementing the grant program in States and in rural communities and to provide recommendations for increasing the impact of the program to improve healthcare in rural America. Public and private entities possessing appropriate qualifications are eligible to apply. Faith

based organizations are eligible to apply for these funds. Applications must be postmarked on or before June 30, 2003, to be considered. The award will be for a period of five years; continuation funding of up to \$1 million annually in succeeding years is contingent upon availability of funds and grantee performance.

Name of Grant Program: Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility Program Evaluation (MRHFPE), Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number 93.241.

Program Authorization: In 1997, section 1820 of the Social Security Act authorized the Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility program. Reauthorization is pending. The appropriation for this program is provided in Public Law 108-7 (Consolidated Appropriations Resolution, 2003).

Submitting Applications: To receive a complete application kit, applicants may telephone the HRSA Grants Application Center at 1-877-477-2123 beginning June 4, 2003. This program uses the standard form PHS 5161-1 (revised 7/00) for applications (approved under OMB number 0920-0428). Applications must be received by 4 p.m. eastern time on July 3, 2003. An original and two copies must be submitted to the HRSA Grants Applications Center (GAC), 901 Russell Avenue, Suite 450, Gaithersburg, MD 20879, telephone 1-877-477-2123, e-mail HRSAAGAC@HRSA.gov. Applicants will be notified through the same channels that currently announce the availability of downloadable and paper application materials, including notices on HRSA Web sites and e-mail communications. HRSA anticipates our first on-line grant applications will be available later in 2003. On-line submission of applications will be encouraged at that time; hard copy applications will still be accepted.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: For the 65 million people living in rural America, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' mission to protect health and to provide assistance for those in need is especially relevant. Healthcare in rural communities supports communities' well-being and represents a significant segment of the local economies. These programs, however, frequently lack adequate funds, personnel and support networks.

For more than a decade, the Office of Rural Health Policy (ORHP) has supported activities that assist States, localities and rural citizens as they work to build and sustain high-quality rural health care delivery systems. The Flex program provides funds to States to

develop State rural health plans, support conversion of eligible small rural hospital facilities to critical access status (*see* Medicare conditions of participation for critical access hospitals), support rural EMS, and foster rural health care network development. This combination of activities is managed by each State in a manner that meets program objectives and is simultaneously most appropriate for the individual State. Taken as a whole, the purpose of the program is to improve access to care and quality of care by strengthening and integrating rural health care delivery systems while improving small hospital finances through providing cost based reimbursement.

Evaluation of the Flex program during its first four operational years has produced an important body of knowledge about rural health care, rural hospitals, financial issues, network development, EMS integration and community engagement in rural health care decision-making. This work has been performed by a consortium of six Centers: Southern Maine University, University of Minnesota, University of North Carolina Sheps Center, University of Nebraska (Rural Policy Research Institute), University of Washington and the Walsh Center of Project Hope. Information resulting from the evaluation is publicly available. As the program matures, the evaluation process will focus less on the process of converting hospitals to critical access status and more on development of rural organized systems of care, financial performance, impact on access to and quality of care, disease management, community role, and impact on health status of rural populations served by these emerging systems. Improving clinical, financial and leadership performance of rural healthcare organizations, access to capital and progress in acquisition and use of technology will be important areas of evaluation. Development of appropriate performance measures and documenting the impact of this program will provide enormous value to rural Americans.

Purpose: The purpose of this cooperative agreement is to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of implementation of the Flex program both nationally and at the level of the State, to make the information thus obtained publicly available, and to make recommendations for improving program effectiveness at all levels. Specifically, through this cooperative agreement, the grantee will:

- Design and implement appropriate mechanisms for the next phase of evaluation and dissemination;