VERMONT | **Department of Health**
Agency of Human Services

Stories about Rural Health Showed Innovation and Resilience in the Wake of Irene

**Gov. Shumlin proclaims Nov. 17 as the first-ever
National Rural Health Day in Vermont**

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BURLINGTON – When floods from Irene demolished roads and isolated residents for several days, health care providers at Rochester Health Center organized a plan to get their patients needed medications.

People with working cell phones climbed the 2,800-foot mountain that divides Rochester from Randolph's Gifford Medical Center to call in orders to clinical staff at the hospital. The prescriptions were filled and handed off to volunteers who delivered the medications back to the clinic in Rochester using ATVs (all terrain vehicles).

"Staff of rural health centers were the very communities that they were supporting," said Teresa Voci, vice president of medicine at Gifford Medical Center. "This is the beauty of rural health care: our patients, their families and visitors appreciate the local access to care they receive, not just in disasters but always."

Similar stories of rural health care providers responding with and for their communities have been heard all around the state. The Vermont Department of Health's Office of Rural Health & Primary Care is collecting these stories, in words and by video, to celebrate the first-ever National Rural Health Day proclaimed by Gov. Peter Shumlin today in Montpelier.

"Health care providers in our state exemplify the "power of rural" and community connectedness," said Gov. Shumlin. "Today we recognize the unique ability of rural health care providers – clinicians, administrators and support staff of hospitals, clinics, long-term care and home health agencies, pharmacies, EMS and first responders – to provide critical services across Vermont."

In Barre, the People's Health and Wellness Clinic on Main Street was hit by Irene after extensive spring flooding in May that caused more than $70,000 damage. Water soaked through sheetrock walls, wicked up into the insulation, destroyed computers, settled into unreachable concrete basins below the windows, which led to mold blooms that required extensive cleanup.

One staff nurse, one nurse practitioner, and more than 60 volunteers continued to serve patients out of a doctor's office at Central Vermont Medical Center during three rounds of renovation and air testing to make sure their building was safe to re-occupy. The clinic has more than 1,600 visits a year.

"We had a volunteer who lives in a trailer park. Her home was wiped out, but she still came in and worked", said Peter Youngbaer, director of the clinic. "We were scrambling to get out medications to patients in the surrounding community – people with high blood pressure who could have been hospitalized if we weren't able to reach them. Some of us may have been wiped out, but we still came in."

"The great flooding this year really tested rural health care providers and clinics around the state to care for their patients and their communities through thick and thin," said Health Commissioner Harry Chen, MD. "Despite broken roads and damaged facilities, loss of power and communications, rural health came through with a combination of caring, mutual aid, innovation, and just knowing their community."

The Health Department invites you to tell your stories of rural health in action.
Join us, and post your photos, videos and stories on our **Facebook page**.

For more information on National Rural Health Day visit: **http://celebratepowerofrural.org**.

Follow the Health Department on **Twitter** and join us on **Facebook** for up-to-date news, alerts and health information.

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