



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Vermont's Leadership on Opioid Abuse Takes Center Stage at New England Rural Health Conference



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BURLINGTON – Vermont Agency of Human Services Secretary Harry Chen, MD, will be the keynote speaker at the New England Rural Health Conference to be held October 1-3 at the Westford Regency Hotel in Westford, MA.

Dr. Chen will also lead a roundtable discussion with state substance abuse prevention experts from Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire and Rhode Island about priority actions for responding to the opiate epidemic that has plagued many rural communities.

Unlike larger states, health care in Vermont is primarily rural health care. Nearly two-thirds of the population lives and works in 12 of 14 rural counties. "Rural communities face unique challenges," said Dr. Chen. "This conference offers health care professionals an opportunity to share ideas, identify actions and build on existing federal and state collaborations."

The conference opens Oct. 1 at 8:30 a.m. The focus of Day 1 – the New England Rural Health Symposium – is opioid abuse. Betsy Rosenfeld, regional health administrator for the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services will set the stage by discussing New England's leading role in confronting substance abuse with an approach that joins behavioral health and primary care services.

Dr. Chen will give the keynote speech 9:00 – 10:15 a.m., followed by the roundtable discussion with state leaders. Vermont filmmaker Bess O'Brien of Kingdom County Productions will preview her documentary The Hungry Heart at 12:15 – 1:30 pm. The film will be presented in full later that day.

Subjects to be tackled at the symposium reflect many of the priorities identified by the New England governors when they met in June:

- Coordinating substance abuse prevention messages
- Unified prescribing guidelines for pain management
- Sharing prescription drug monitoring systems across state lines
- Integrating opiate addiction screening, intervention & treatment into primary care
- Increasing access to a variety of treatment services

The focus of Day 2 is Leadership & Networking: Federal and State Partnerships, and Day 3 is Oral Health in Rural New England.

For more information or to register: www.newenglandruralhealth.org

For more information about rural health in Vermont: http://healthvermont.gov/rural/rural_health.aspx

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