

# *Creating Futures*

University of Colorado *Denver*

## *Rural Health Initiative:*

*Improving the Health of Rural Coloradans*

*Photo by Jack Westfall, MD*

# The Problem

## **There is a health-care crisis in rural America.**

*And it goes back many years. In 1943 a young farm girl in rural Colorado came down with a fever and abdominal pain. The family sent for the doctor. Because one of the town doctors had gone overseas in the war effort, the only other physician was unable to leave the practice for a house-call. The 8-year-old girl died the next day of appendicitis.*

*Fast forward to 2009 and we find that not much has changed. A startling lack of doctors in small towns continues to put patients at risk. This past winter, a young woman and her husband showed up at a small, rural, Critical Access Hospital. She was in labor with her first child, but unfortunately the small hospital couldn't offer OB services or anesthesia due to a lack of local, trained physicians. Because of a raging snowstorm, the road to Denver was closed and the urban hospitals were out of reach. That small town hospital was their only hope. Fortunately, the doctor who was covering the ER that night had been trained in Family Medicine and was able to safely deliver the baby. If the mom or baby had suffered any complications or required anesthesia or monitoring, the outcome might have been very different. They were lucky. But when it comes to rural Coloradans receiving adequate health care, folks shouldn't have to rely so heavily on luck.*





Wet Mountain Tribune

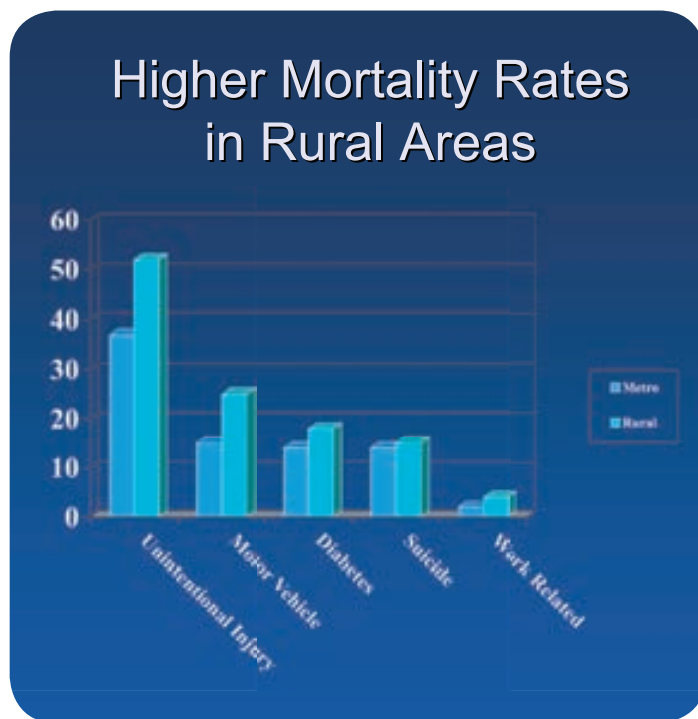
These two stories illustrate just how little health care has changed in rural America over the past 70 years. The impact is huge.

Twenty percent of Americans live in rural areas and only nine percent of the nation's physicians practice in small towns. To make matters worse, only three percent of recent medical school graduates plan to practice in rural communities.

In Colorado, the situation is just as dire. Nearly 75 percent of Colorado is rural with more than 600,000 people living in rural areas, yet more than 90 percent of Colorado counties are designated wholly, or in part, as Health Professional Shortage Areas.\* The number of doctors, nurses, dentists, pharmacists and mental health providers is inadequate and shrinking every day.

### As a result...

- People who could be saved are dying. Rural Coloradans suffer higher rates of death due to unintentional injuries, motor vehicle crashes, influenza and pneumonia, diabetes, injury at work and suicide.
- People are needlessly suffering. Lacking proper health care, rural Coloradans experience higher rates of chronic disease and infant mortality than their urban neighbors.



\* The Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) and the Medically Underserved Area (MUA) are two key federal designations that help identify areas of the country with severe health provider access issues and areas in need of assistance with health-care delivery.

*“In ongoing trips around the state, we see physician shortages, a nursing crisis, a lack of adequate dental care, a need for continuing medical education, assistance with management of complicated patient cases and support for rural students interested in health-care careers. In response to these critical situations, the Rural Health Initiative was born.”*

—Jack Westfall, MD, MPH,  
Patrick and Kathleen  
Thompson Endowed Chair in  
Rural Health and Associate  
Dean of Rural Health,  
University of Colorado Denver  
School of Medicine



Wet Mountain Tribune

**The situation is further complicated by the fact that...**

- Higher rates of poverty in rural Colorado result in less access to the medical care that people so gravely need.
- As our rural populations age, the need for family practice doctors, internists and geriatric specialists grows. Yet there are fewer caregivers than ever to meet this increasing need.
- Methamphetamine use has exploded in rural Colorado, according to state public health officials, impacting all levels of physical and mental health.
- When migrant populations move into rural areas each year, the number of indigent patients doubles or even triples. This dramatic increase puts immense pressure on health-care providers' ability to serve these individuals with uncontrolled, chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension.

# The Solution

## **You can help.**

Through the Rural Health Initiative of the University of Colorado Denver, we will save lives and improve the health of rural Coloradans—from the tiniest infant to the most elderly senior.

We'll do this by educating a new generation of health-care professionals who are committed to practicing in rural areas. Training and placing them is one part of the equation; retaining them is the other. By focusing on these strategies, through the Rural Health Initiative, we will improve health care and access to it.

The University of Colorado Denver is uniquely poised to partner with rural communities to develop and implement solutions to the lack of adequate health care and the prevalence of poor health among rural Coloradans of all ages.

## *The time is now.*

The need has never been greater.

Join the fight to save lives and improve the health of some of the most vulnerable citizens of our state. Your gift will bring hope and health to the thousands of Coloradans impacted by the Rural Health Initiative.

***“The need for a comprehensive plan to address the health-care problems in rural Colorado is greater than ever. Higher rates of mortality, poverty and drug use—coupled with an extreme shortage of physicians and other health professionals—have created a dangerous and volatile situation.”***

—Richard D. Krugman, MD,  
Vice Chancellor for Health  
Affairs and Dean of the  
School of Medicine,  
University of  
Colorado Denver



*“We’re facing a perfect storm in terms of rural Colorado health: The numbers of providers are shrinking, the elderly population continues to grow and we are seeing more patients than ever with chronic conditions. If we don’t continue to build on the momentum of the proactive measures we’ve already started, I see nothing but dark skies ahead.”*

—Jack Westfall, MD, MPH,  
Patrick and Kathleen  
Thompson Endowed Chair in  
Rural Health and Associate  
Dean of Rural Health,  
University of Colorado Denver  
School of Medicine



## The Rural Health Initiative: How it Works

*When you give to the Rural Health Initiative, you can make an impact in a variety of ways.*

### **Pipeline Programs**

You can direct your dollars to “pipeline programs” that foster rural students’ interest in health careers from the elementary years on through middle school, high school and college. This approach to health education improves science and health career education for all students and, in the process, attracts the most highly qualified students to enter health careers.

### **Research**

Your dollars can support practice-based research that not only studies the best ways to reach and treat rural communities, but in the process, improves health care through activities of the research study. For example, a recent study at the University focused on the best practices to encourage rural people to get screened for colon cancer. This collaborative program was developed by and for rural community members and was supported by researchers in the Department of Family Medicine. The study not only provided doctors at the University with valuable data about the best ways to promote cancer screening, but in the process, physicians succeeded in screening an estimated 3,000 people.

## Scholarships and Fellowships

Your dollars can support scholarships and fellowships for promising students from rural communities who are committed to practicing medicine in small towns across Colorado. Whether you decide to contribute to an already established scholarship, or to create a new fund that you help to design, your support will make a real difference in the lives of health-care professionals committed to a rural practice. Examples of existing programs include scholarships for medical students engaged in the Rural Track program that provides special training for rural practitioners, and Rural Nurse Fellowships designed to train nurse professors who will teach and train other nurses in rural areas.



### *The Rural Health Initiative uses a three-pronged approach:*

- Health education for rural elementary-aged children all the way through high school and even college in order to create a “pipeline” of educated, motivated health professionals who want to live in rural areas.
- Practice-based research to improve the provision of health care to rural populations.
- Scholarships and fellowships that aim to place health-care providers in small towns.

*High school students from the San Luis Valley take chemistry through the Summer Health Careers Institute.*



*Dr. Ricardo Velasquez discusses the field of medicine with interested high school students.*

## Track Record of Success

The Rural Health Initiative already has many successful programs in place. Generous individuals and foundations across the state have come together to make these programs possible. Now is the time to build upon this momentum in order to affect real change for rural people in need.

### **Building on Momentum**

Recently, civic leaders and generous individuals have stepped up to support the Rural Health Initiative in numerous ways. Help us build upon their momentum and make a difference in rural communities.

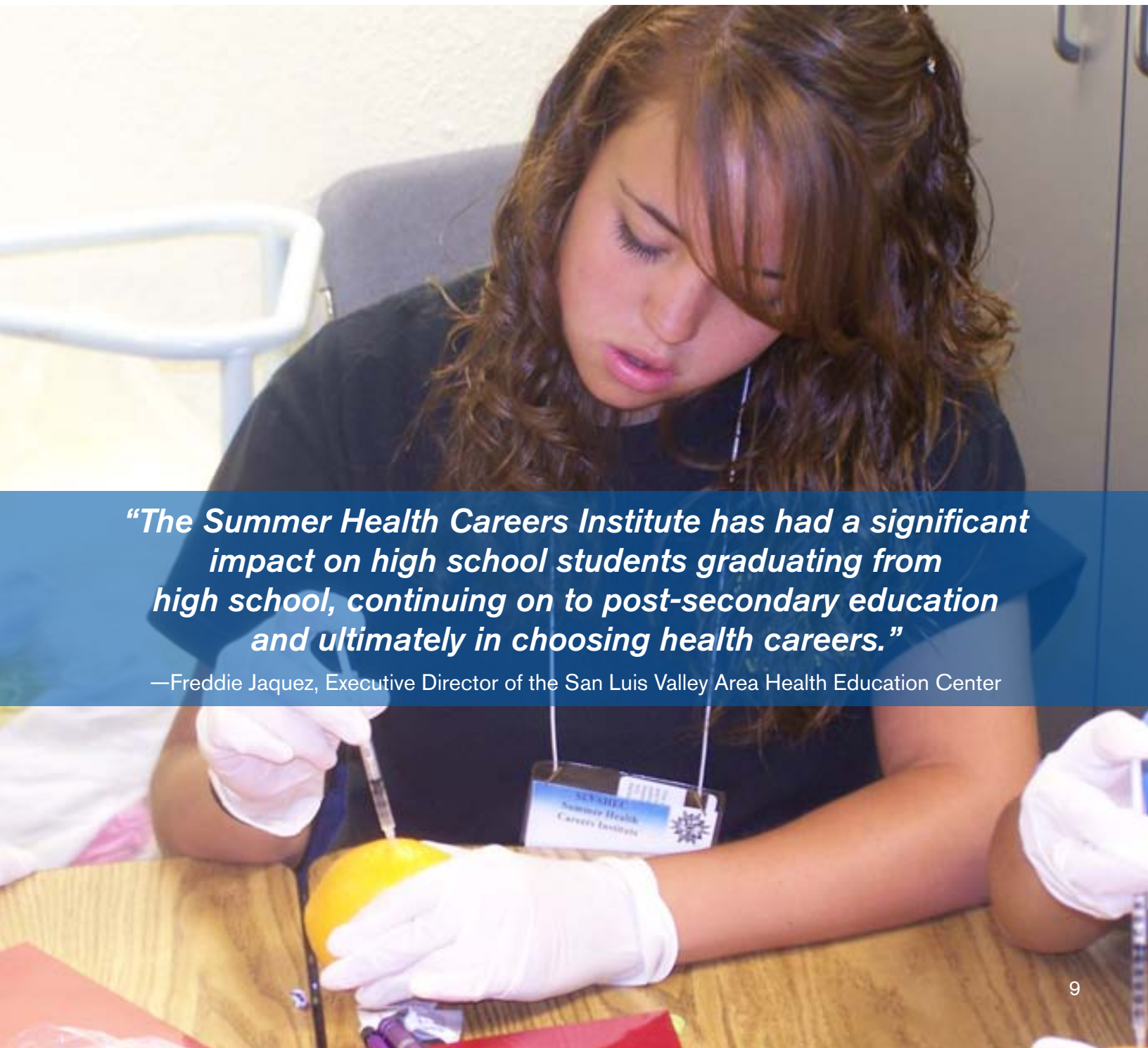
Colorado Trust	\$3.1 million for the CREATE Health Program to improve health and science education for rural Colorado students and attract the best rural students to health careers
Williams Family Foundation	\$2 million for the Patrick and Kathleen Thompson Endowed Chair in Rural Health
Janet Mordecai	\$1.5 million for the Daniel and Janet Mordecai Rural Health Nursing Endowed Chair and \$400,000 for four Rural Health Nursing Endowed Fellowships
Colorado Trust	\$280,000 to establish the Rural Track
The Colorado Health Foundation	\$150,000 for CREATE Health rural pilot programs in Walsenburg, Alamosa and Delta
Walt Dear	\$131,000 for the Hermosa Creek Scholarship in Rural Medicine
National Western Stock Show	\$25,000 per year for Scholarships for Rural Health
Anschutz Family Foundation	\$10,000 for the Rural Track and \$10,000 for the Rural Health Scholars Program

**The Rural Track** is a new program within the University of Colorado Denver School of Medicine that identifies students interested in eventual rural practice, admits them to medical school and supports their interest during the entire four years of school. All students in the Rural Track meet the same rigorous academic and personal qualifications required of all students for admission. Most students in the Rural Track have a personal history of growing up or living in a rural area and all express a strong desire to eventually live and practice in a rural community, usually in a primary care medical specialty. The first class of Rural Track students will graduate in 2009 and move on to residency training.

Since its inception, the Rural Track has attracted an increasing number of applicants. Current resources permit admission of 12 to 15 students per class. Students in the Rural Track are provided with additional lectures, seminars, workshops and clinical experience concentrated in the first two years of medical school and extending through all four years.

**The Rural Health Scholars Program** is a summer program for interested and talented high school students from rural communities in Colorado who join students at the University of Colorado Denver Anschutz Medical Campus for hands-on experience in health-care academics. The program provides room and board for students, as well as three weeks of unique exposure to health-care professions. This program was established 10 years ago and has enjoyed great success with students and faculty.

**The Area Health Education Center Summer Health Institute** is a one-week program where high school students explore medical health professions and have the opportunity to tour health-care facilities; discuss career options with professors and health practitioners; and shadow a health professional during a trip to the Anschutz Medical Campus “Shadowing Days.” Over the past 25 years, this program has successfully educated more than 250 students in the San Luis Valley. Over the past five years, the statewide program on the University campus has provided an introduction to health careers to over 200 students from all over Colorado.



*“The Summer Health Careers Institute has had a significant impact on high school students graduating from high school, continuing on to post-secondary education and ultimately in choosing health careers.”*

—Freddie Jaquez, Executive Director of the San Luis Valley Area Health Education Center



***“I can’t think of a better fit or more satisfying vocation than practicing medicine in the place where I grew up.”***

—Autumn Orser, medical student in the Rural Track and scholarship recipient

## *Scholarships make an impact for future caregivers*

Fourth-year medical student Autumn Orser could have chosen to specialize in surgery, dermatology or any number of medical specialties known for bringing in the “big bucks.” Instead, this 26-year-old is planning to return to the San Luis Valley where she was born and raised, and follow in the footsteps of her childhood pediatrician, Dr. Robert Kelly. Part of what has made this possible is a \$6,000 scholarship she’s received each year from the National Western Scholarship Trust.

“The scholarship has been really helpful,” says Orser. It does more than just help pay the \$48,000 annual cost of attendance; it keeps her motivated while surrounded by medical students who are studying much more lucrative specialties. Orser has attended the National Western Stock Show each year and helps out at events like

the Junior Livestock Auction and spoke at the Citizens of the West Dinner.

Orser began thinking seriously about becoming a rural pediatrician in high school after listening to a conversation between her father and Kelly, the only pediatrician in town. Kelly lamented that he could not retire because no other doctor wanted to take his place.

“I just started thinking about whether I was capable of becoming a doctor and whether the valley was a place I wanted to stay for the rest of my life,” she said. “All of the answers were yes, so it started me on the path.”

Orser is one of only 10 percent of her class studying rural medicine. But she’s on track to fulfill a lifelong dream.

## *Hearts and history in rural Colorado*

The Williams Family Foundation has a rich history in small-town Colorado. A. F. Williams, MD, arrived in Colorado in 1903 and spent a lifetime taking care of people in Ft. Morgan and the surrounding communities. He established his foundation at the end of his career because he understood the importance of good quality medicine for everyone. The Williams Family Foundation has supported health care in the state's rural areas for decades, including more than 25 years of giving to the University of Colorado Denver School of Medicine.

In May of 2007, guided by Trustees Pat Thompson, MD, and his wife, Kathy, the Williams Family Foundation made a leadership gift of \$2 million to establish the Patrick and Kathleen Thompson Endowed Chair in Rural Health, currently held by Jack Westfall, MD, MPH. Westfall is the University of Colorado Denver's first Associate Dean of Rural Health at the School of Medicine. This generous gift

has allowed the University to create this historic position and make rural health a University-wide priority.

"So much of the innovative work that is being done in rural communities can be chalked up to the generosity of the Williams Family Foundation, and in particular, to Trustees Pat and Kathy Thompson," Westfall says.

Kathy and her husband established the Endowed Chair in Rural Health in order to improve physician outreach and provide quality family physicians for small towns. To this end, the Williams Family Foundation also offers scholarships to Morgan County high school graduates in medicine, nursing, dentistry, physical therapy and related disciplines.

Asked how Westfall, in particular, will make an impact, Thompson says, "Jack's heart is in medicine and his heart is in rural Colorado. And where his heart is, his energy goes with it."



*A. F. Williams, MD, visits quarantined small pox patients in a tent hospital at the Empire Reservoir in 1906. Williams took a train from Ft. Morgan to Wiggins; he then rode a horse from Wiggins to see his patients. From left to right is A.F. Williams on horseback, a guard provided by the county to maintain the quarantine, a man who provided medical support, a nurse/cook and an assistant to the nurse.*



*College of Nursing Alumna Janet Mordecai has a passion to improve health care for rural Coloradans.*

## *Following your passion, making a difference*

Janet Mordecai decided to make a personal investment in rural health. Last year, she donated a total of \$1.9 million to the University of Colorado Denver School of Nursing. With \$1.5 million she established the Daniel and Janet Mordecai Rural Health Nursing Endowed Chair; with the remaining \$400,000 she endowed four Rural Health Nursing Fellowships. Mrs. Mordecai's awareness of rural Colorado's health-care shortage began in her first year of college, working as a nurse in a migrant labor camp in Ft. Lupton.

At the camp she met a 19-year-old man whom she brought into the clinic. He was diagnosed with a congenital heart defect called tetralogy of fallot.

"You don't see anybody with this disease today... because that kind of problem would routinely be diagnosed at birth and corrected," Mrs. Mordecai says. That is, unless a family or child had no access to health care.

The young man couldn't work in the fields because of his heart defect, and was shunned by his community as a result. "He came to our clinic and I got somebody from the University Clinic interested in talking to him. They sent him to the University of Colorado Hospital where they performed the surgery pro bono."

"The day he went to work in the fields was the proudest day of his life," Mrs. Mordecai says. "All it took was what most of us take for granted, access to quality health care."

Mrs. Mordecai has children and grandchildren in Alamosa, Colorado. Over the years she's seen the difficulty they've had in getting good medical care.

"I know it's still a problem that our friends and family in rural areas struggle with. It makes my passion to solve the shortage even stronger."

Donors like Janet Mordecai are changing the landscape of rural health—for the better.

## *Paying it forward: Nurse Fellow Amanda Jojola*

Amanda Jojola is one of the first recipients of the Rural Nursing Fellowships, established by Janet Mordecai. She has been a nurse for nearly 20 years, a family nurse practitioner since 1999 and for the past five years, a nurse educator at Adams State College in Alamosa.

"I can't tell you how much I appreciate this fellowship and opportunity to pursue my advanced degree...most people aren't this fortunate," says Jojola. The fellowship pays for her tuition and provides a living stipend.

The goal of the fellowships is to produce more doctoral and master's prepared nurses in rural

Colorado. Jojola has already signed a contract to come back and teach at Adams State, where she will train rural nurses.

"We have such a huge nursing shortage and it is even a greater problem in rural areas," says Jojola. "With a doctorate under my belt, I hope to make myself heard at the local, state and national level, so I'll have some influence to increase nursing professionals in rural areas."

When she returns to teaching she'll also return to part-time nursing practice. And best of all, for the folks in Alamosa, Jojola makes house-calls.



*Nurse Fellow Amanda Jojola, center, trains rural nurses.*

## Make a Difference

*Early gifts from civic leaders and foundations have set the pace for this project. Help us build on the momentum by making a gift of any amount to the Rural Health Initiative.*

*Join the fight to improve health care in rural Colorado and make a gift to the Rural Health Initiative.*

Whether you support health education for rural elementary-aged children, practice-based research or scholarships for future medical providers in small towns, you'll know that your gift counts.

Help ensure that vulnerable individuals in rural areas have the resources and trained caregivers they need to safely deliver a baby without having to rely upon luck.

Help ensure that rural areas will have the doctors and nurses they need to care for their citizens in the way they deserve.

With your gift, the University of Colorado Denver is uniquely poised to educate, train and place talented caregivers of all types throughout Colorado. With your help, we will improve the health and wellbeing of more than 600,000 Coloradans living in rural communities across our state.





*With your gift, the University of Colorado Denver is uniquely poised to educate, train and place talented caregivers of all types throughout Colorado.*



*Photo by Mark Deutchman, MD*

## **Contact**

To learn about the many ways  
you can make a gift, contact:

### **Stephanie Spence**

Senior Director of Development  
University of Colorado Denver  
303-728-4217

[stephanie.spence@cufund.org](mailto:stephanie.spence@cufund.org)

**University of  
Colorado Denver**

February 2009