



Serving Douglas County Since 1964

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Oregonians for Rural Health
522 SE Washington Avenue, Suite 107
Roseburg, OR 97470

Several years ago, Umpqua Community College joined local leaders, businesses, economic groups and others in exploring innovative solutions to revitalizing Southern Oregon's struggling economy. New economic drivers are sorely needed that provide greater stability and certainty, in addition to family-wage jobs critical to reversing the region's high poverty levels. Capitalizing on the strength and vitality of healthcare emerged to the forefront of options. Demand for healthcare professionals in a wide range of fields, particularly in advanced and specialty areas, is growing and threatening access to care. Building a regional allied health medical college will provide a more robust pipeline of skilled professionals to ensure access to healthcare, while serving as a much-needed economic engine for the region.

Our once thriving timber industry has significantly dwindled over the last 40 years, resulting in unemployment rates consistently higher than state and national averages. About one in ten jobs are in the region's manufacturing sector today as compared to about one in three jobs during the 1970s. Logging restrictions combined with increased mill mechanization has steadily reduced the number of manufacturing jobs in the region and, consequently, job opportunities. Today, Southern Oregon is experiencing a large exodus of its youth and young families as they leave in search of jobs elsewhere.

Yet, job vacancies exist in a range of healthcare fields and are projected to grow. Oregon's healthcare industry consistently tops the list of total job vacancies, as well as difficult-to-fill jobs, among private industries in the state. Despite the recession, the industry has posted consistent job growth since the 1990s. However, job vacancies for nursing assistants, registered nurses and other healthcare positions are becoming increasingly difficult to fill. The reason is largely due to the lack of applicants and qualified candidates. Rates of difficult-to-fill healthcare jobs are especially high in many areas across Southern and Rural Oregon as recently confirmed by the Oregon Employment Department's 2015 Job Vacancy Survey Report.

A number of key factors are adding to increased demand for healthcare not only in Southern and Rural Oregon, but for many U.S. communities. National healthcare reforms have connected more individuals with physical and mental health services, thus increasing overall demand for services. The number of uninsured Oregonians has dramatically dropped, especially in Southern Oregon. Plus, a "silver tsunami" of soon-to-retire baby boomers with increasing healthcare needs will put an even greater strain on our system. And, notably, Southern Oregon already has a larger percentage of older adult residents than other areas of the state.

By working collectively to build a pipeline of healthcare professionals at all levels for our region, we can ensure ongoing access to critical physical and mental services. Those who train in rural areas are more likely to stay and work in rural areas than those trained in urban areas. Plus, youth and young families will have a reason to stay in Southern and Rural Oregon to take advantage of job training and career opportunities. And, individuals from surrounding areas, including out-of-state, will have a reason to relocate to the region, as well.

We look forward to the opportunity to collaborate on the regional allied health medical college in providing advanced job training and career opportunities for our students and graduates. The higher level nursing, allied health, dental and mental/behavioral health programs anticipated for the college will give those seeking advanced training the ability to do so here in the region. Being able to offer an attractive regional network of entry to high level healthcare training programs will help boost student recruitment and enrollment. And, graduates can take advantage of job fulfillment programs also anticipated to be offered through the college in partnership with regional healthcare providers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Walter H. Nolte', written in a cursive style.

Walter H. Nolte, Ph.D.
Interim President