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## Providing Continuing Education For Rural Health Care Professionals

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Maintaining professional competency for health care professionals in a rural area is a difficult if not impossible task:

—Most educational programs dealing with continuing education for health care professionals are very expensive and are conducted many miles away in the larger cities like St. Louis, Kansas City, Springfield, Columbia and St. Joseph.

—Rural health care facilities are limited in numbers of personnel and cannot allow staff to be gone from the premises the amount of time necessary to attend the out-of-town continuing education programs; and,

—The problem is compounded by the fact that continuing education programs designed for the general health care professional audience including registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, ministers, social workers, family service workers, and the general public are almost non-existent — most health care professional continuing education programs are specifically designed for registered nurses.

The University of Missouri Extension had worked successfully in 1977-78 with the Grand River Chapter, Missouri Association of Licensed Practical Nurses, in conducting six well attended one day

workshops on the following mental health topics:

1. Child Abuse and Neglect,
2. Growth and Development - Behavior Problems,
3. Teenage and Adult Alcoholism and Drug Abuse,
4. Depression and Suicide,
5. The Dying Patient and His Family,
6. Mental Health and the Older Adult.

We had an average attendance of 45 at each session with such results reported as:

- Better understanding and carrying out of the law,
- Have been able to prevent some suicides,
- Can now understand and deal with a "special" child,
- Help families better who have a "drug abuser" member,
- Helped a family cope with their feelings toward a dying member, and,
- Have used the skill of a more understanding communication with an older family member.

Again in 1979 the topics would help these health care professionals to obtain:

- Quality continuing education programs in the rural area close to their work site, and;
- Continuing Education Units.

A series of seven-one day workshops were planned and five of the following topics have already been conducted:

1. Management and Assessment of the Cardiac Patient - A Team Approach;

2. Stress, Anxiety, and Depression;
3. Psychodrama;
4. More Effective Therapeutic Communication for the Health Care Professional;
5. The Sex Experience Cycle of the Physically and/or Emotionally Disabled Person;
6. Assertive Training for the Health Care Professional; and,
7. The Human Side of the Aging Process.

The Academic Unit accrediting the program is the Graduate Nursing Department of the University of Missouri - Kansas City with assistance of the Western Missouri Area Health Education Center.

- The health care professionals:
- Received their quality accredited continuing education programs;
  - Had an attendance far beyond expectations with an average of 87 at the first five sessions;

—Plan to have a continuing series of six workshops each year; and,

—Reported such results as: "Better understanding of the heart patient's concerns and problems as well as how to manage effective treatments;"

"I now know the importance of removing blocks that hinder me from communicating therapeutically with the person with whom I work;"

"The insight that everyone has to cope in some way with stress, anxiety and depression, so working it out in my own life helps me be a better helper to others."

"This experience in 'Psychodrama' is like having an opportunity to start life all over again - GREAT!"

"I now understand and will be able to explain better the patient's attitudes, feelings and thoughts with their various changing lifestyles."

