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**“Bioterrorism and Public Health Emergency Grant to Address Local Preparedness Issues”**

**Charleston, South Carolina** – The catastrophic hurricanes of recent weeks have reinforced the need for coordinated responses from local communities during an emergency. Building on the success of the awareness training completed during the past two years, the South Carolina Area Health Education Consortium (SC AHEC) was successful in competing for a new three-year, \$3.8 million dollar grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration to continue to address the bioterrorism and public health emergency training needs of health professionals across South Carolina.

During the first two years of the SC AHEC Bioterrorism and Public Health Emergency Network, awareness programs were attended by over 12,000 health professionals, students and first responders. Programs were offered to community practitioners, hospital workers, long term care and community health center personnel, and academic faculty and students.

“The first two years of training laid an excellent foundation by providing health care professionals with a very good understanding of the issues pertaining to public health emergencies”, explains Dr. David Garr, the Bioterrorism Network’s Principal Investigator and SC AHEC Executive Director. “The next three years will provide professionals with the skills they will need in the event their community is seriously impacted by an event.”

Emergency preparedness and response issues include all forms of terrorism, natural disasters and tragic accidents. The goal of this program to provide the health care workforce with the

knowledge, skills, abilities and core competencies to recognize indications of a terrorist event; meet the acute care needs of patients, including pediatric and other vulnerable populations; participate in a coordinated, multidisciplinary response to emergencies; and rapidly and effectively alert the public health system of such an event at the community, state, and national levels.

“Recent events have made it very clear that we must be prepared to respond to disasters that can wipe out critical infrastructure and leave local communities dependent solely on their own resources”, states Beth Kennedy, the Bioterrorism Network Project Director.

“The Bioterrorism and Public Health Preparedness Training Network from the beginning has taught that local communities need to be prepared to address the emergency issues in their communities for at least the first 72 hours. We will continue to deliver this message during the next three years as we include local communities and elected officials in our training exercises”.

Activities include providing regional and statewide training programs, implementing a volunteer preparation course, serving vulnerable populations including children and the elderly, and serving high risk target areas including rural communities, ports/coastal areas, and nuclear/chemical facilities. Also included is the establishment of a Bioterrorism Network Training Resource Center.

“The Resource Center will permit us to help other new grant recipients across the nation acquire information about what methods and approaches have worked when training health professionals”, explains Dr. Garr. “They will benefit from our past two years of experience and therefore, should be able develop their programs more quickly and effectively”.

The South Carolina AHEC exists to help improve the health of South Carolina’s citizens. Established in 1972, the SC AHEC is the only organization in South Carolina that addresses health care workforce needs starting at the level of primary and secondary school education and extending to practicing health care professionals throughout the state.

For more information about Bioterrorism programs, visit [www.scahec.net](http://www.scahec.net) or contact Beth Kennedy, Project Director, at 843-792-4431.