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ACHIEVEMENTS IN RURAL HEALTH RECOGNIZED BY PRESIDENT’S AWARD

MEREDITH, NH – The New England Rural Health RoundTable (NERHRT), a nonprofit organization committed to improving health and health care throughout rural New England, presented the 2010 President’s Award to Kate Simmons, MBA, MPH, on October 29 at their Annual Symposium in Meredith, NH. Ms. Simmons, Manager of VT Operations for Bi-State Primary Care Association, received the award for her efforts in the area of rural health that have had significant impact on the growing alliance of organizations and individuals who work to make NERHRT a strong consortium.

Upon accepting the award, Ms. Simmons said, “I am honored to have received this award. I feel very fortunate to work with such an exceptional staff at Bi-State and to work in support of Vermont’s health centers that, every day, are developing new and innovative programming to better serve their rural and underserved patients.”



Award recipient, Kate Simmons, poses with her Bi-State Primary Care Association colleagues, L-R: Michelle Parent, Denis Barton, Tess Stack Kuenning, Kristen Bigelow-Talbert, Kate Simmons, Heather Skeels, Lori Real.

Rural areas are highly dependent on support from programs designed to help sustain the health care infrastructure, including Rural

Health Clinics and Federally Qualified Health Centers. Approximately 20 percent (2.7 million) of New England’s 14 million inhabitants live in rural areas that comprise 83 percent of the land mass. Access to health care is more challenging for rural residents who are 37 percent more likely to be uninsured than urban residents, and face the additional challenges of geographic isolation and lack of public transportation.¹ (Source: A Comparative Analysis of Health Data for the New England Region, A Report by the New England Rural Health RoundTable).

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“Kate’s many outstanding leadership accomplishments are one reason Vermont’s eight Federally Qualified Health Centers, with 41 medical offices statewide, are so well positioned to care for uninsured and underserved Vermonters,” said Tess Stack Kuenning, executive director of Bi-State Primary Care Association. “We are truly grateful that Kate is on Bi-State’s team, and I can’t think of a more deserving individual for the President’s award.”

Through her leadership and successful grant applications on behalf of VT’s Federally Qualified Health Centers, Ms. Simmons has enabled the expansion of health information technology and exchange statewide; supported the creation of the Telemedicine Child Psychiatry Project, funded by a USDA Distance Learning and Telemedicine grant and the VT State Office of Rural Health and Primary Care; authored a successful Office of Rural Health Policy application to develop farm worker health programming in partnership with Northern Tier Center for Health and the Open Door Clinic; and drafted a successful application for a Ronald McDonald House Charities’ pediatric dental care mobile unit, staffed by four Federally Qualified Health Centers, that is expanding access to dental care for underserved children. Ms. Simmons’ grassroots FQHC community development work throughout VT is helping to realize the VT Legislature’s goal of a Community Health Center in every county.

Bi-State Primary Care Association, serving New Hampshire and Vermont, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c) 3 organization working to improve access to health care services for people through developing effective health care policy, recruiting clinical providers, and providing technical assistance to communities and Federally Qualified Health Centers. With offices in NH and VT, Bi-State works with federal, state, and regional health policy organizations, foundations, and payers to develop strategies, policies, and programs that promote and sustain community-based primary health care services in medically underserved areas. More information is available online: www.bistatepca.org.

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