Project: Great Falls Center for Healthcare Education and Simulated Hospital Training

Brief Description: MSU-Great Falls College of Technology and MSU-Bozeman College of Nursing request $750,000 for Healthcare Education and Simulated Hospital Training Center to serve Northcentral Montana.

Executive Summary: MSU-Great Falls has eight healthcare programs requiring students to practice clinical hours ranging from 60 to almost 2000 per student prior to graduation; MSU-Bozeman College of Nursing has 80 nursing students who require more than 1,000 clinical hours per student. But facility time and patients in healthcare facilities are at a premium. These colleges also compete for clinical space with a nursing program from MSU-Northern, as well as non-Montana programs that place students in clinical rotations in the state. A clinical scheduling chart shows that during the semester, students are in the major healthcare facility every week day. Healthcare educators must find innovative ways to better use the clinical time and space available. Instruction and practice with simulation equipment prepares students to make better use of their limited clinical time. And, colleges believe simulation practice can replace some of those clinical requirements, allowing more students to enroll and ultimately enter health professions.

Project Description: Demand for healthcare workers is high, but healthcare programs cannot expand. The limited clinical space has forced the colleges to enforce enrollment caps. In Fall 2009, 171 students applied for MSU-Great Falls healthcare programs; only 94 of them were accepted. MSU-Great Falls estimates that 215 healthcare and nursing students per year will be enrolled in health care education programs that will require clinical experience and will benefit from simulation practical exercises. Based on previous placement surveys, MSU-Great Falls estimates that 90-95% of the graduates will be employed or will seek additional education after graduation. This effort would serve not only pre-licensure students, but also licensed healthcare professionals needing continuing education; licensed unemployed healthcare professional seeking refresher education and training to re-enter the workforce; and healthcare faculty.

MSU-Great Falls believes the Center for Healthcare Education and Simulated Hospital could ease this pressure and play a significant role in the economic and personal health of the state.

Congressional Action Needed: An appropriation of $750,000 is requested.

Importance to Montana: Healthcare is one of the truly necessary industries in our society. Not only do most of us, at some point, need healthcare services, but healthcare also is vital for the economy, especially in rural areas. The Montana Department of Labor ranks healthcare as one of the top 10 employers in all of the 11 counties in Northcentral Montana. A 2005 study by Paulien & Associates listed healthcare as one of the top three industries with the most potential for growth for the region. Healthcare jobs are appealing to workers. A recent report, *Labor Availability in North Central Montana,* completed June 2009 by the Bureau of Business and Economic Research, notes that across the region, 6.4% (7,200) of adults in Northcentral Montana are unemployed, and that an additional 3.1% (3,500) are involuntarily working part time. The report said 14,200 people in the region are willing to be trained in health service fields. All of these factors point to the potential for growth and strength in the healthcare sector. But this industry faces a constant recruiting challenge. And the state's educational institutions cannot meet the demand because of the clinical limitation. How to get unemployed and underemployed workers into healthcare jobs is a huge challenge that will take creative solutions. Simulated hospitals need to be developed and tested so they can help ease the strain on clinical availability.

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