

December 12, 2018
FOR RELEASE AFTER 12:30 p.m.
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Local Health Departments and Public Health Leaders Honored with NC GlaxoSmithKline Foundation Child Health Recognition Awards

Charlotte, NC – The North Carolina GlaxoSmithKline Foundation recognized public health professionals for excellence and innovation in child health care, honoring them as part of its 2018 Child Health Recognition Awards program at the Fall Educational Conference of the North Carolina Public Health Association.

Those honored with awards, were selected from nominations submitted by colleagues and chosen by a selection committee of public health professionals, include:

- **Lifetime Achievement Recognition:** Jean Kesler Vukoson, RN, a retired registered nurse who was a state child health nurse consultant with the Children and Youth Branch of the state public health department
- **Individual Recognition:** Mindy Turner, DDS, a pediatric dentist at the Stanly County Dental Clinic
- **Public Health Staff Recognition:** Dorothy Rawleigh, a child care health consultant in the Chatham County Public Health Department
- **Public health departments in Chatham, Cleveland and Granville Vance counties today received Local Health Department Recognition Awards, for boosting immunization rates, using technology to deliver health care to students and taking an innovative approach to identifying and treating developmental disabilities in children at earlier ages.**

Jean Kesler Vukoson, RN (retired), Lifetime Achievement Recognition Award

From Manteo to Murphy—that’s the reach of Jean Vukoson in bringing better health care to North Carolina’s children. She spent her career in nursing, beginning with direct patient care and moving on to the public health field in the late 1990s. As a state child health nurse consultant for the last decade of her career, she helped health departments serve as medical homes for children and youth with special health care needs and to serve as resources for children in foster care. She forged relationships between health departments, Community Care of N.C. networks, school nurses and social services providers to address obesity, asthma and mental health concerns. She provided mentoring and education to hundreds of enhanced role child health nurses and nurses in health departments. By championing health departments across the state, as well as, the children and families they serve, she exemplifies the highest values of public health care.

Mindy Turner, DDS; Individual Recognition Award

She advocates and educates people that very young children need dental care, that it’s very important. Baby teeth help children chew and speak properly and hold space for permanent teeth, so Dr. Turner likes to see patients by the time they turn one. Dr. Turner helped found the Stanly County Dental Clinic in 2002, when it first opened to children enrolled in the local Head Start programs. It is now a thriving children’s dental clinic. In early years, Dr. Turner collaborated with local school nurses to place sealants on all 2nd and 3rd graders enrolled in the Stanly County School System. She also partners with many other programs and health care providers to promote oral health education and

reduce childhood tooth decay. In addition to being the county's only pediatric dentist and running the clinic, Dr. Turner is an adjunct professor at UNC-Chapel Hill Dental School and serves as preceptor for the UNC-Dentistry in Service to Communities Program, providing a clinical site for dental students and dental hygiene students. Thousands of children in Stanly County have benefited from Dr. Turner's big heart and passion for better dental care.

Dorothy Rawleigh, Public Health Staff Recognition Award

Dorothy Rawleigh's colleagues consider her the best Child Care Health Consultant in the state. She has energetically worked on partnerships resulting in healthier food at child care centers, higher immunization rates and better emergency preparedness planning. She formed a working group with several child care facility owners, nutritionists and public agencies, and got child care staff excited about healthy food by demonstrating recipes and creating test meals. In the area of immunizations, before she started her job, 62 percent of facilities submitted the required Annual Child Care Immunization Report and just 25 percent of facilities showed all children as up-to-date on vaccinations. Last year, those numbers soared to 100 percent and 85 percent, respectively. Dorothy is viewed as a model public health professional and an inspiration to all who work with her.

The three health departments were commended for developing innovative programs that have produced measurable, sustainable outcomes. Highlights of their programs include:

Chatham County Public Health Department Immunization Program

Because of hard work by public health staff and partners, Chatham County is a leader in the state and the country for early child vaccinations. In fact, Chatham regularly ranks #1 in the state in immunization rates among children ages 0 to 36 months; in each of the past three years, these rates have exceeded 90 percent, well above the statewide county average. The Chatham County Health Department has achieved this with an innovative approach blending policy changes, training, tracking, feedback gathering and follow-up with child care facilities. The staff provided training workshops and technical assistance to help licensed child care facilities correctly complete and submit the Annual Child Care Immunization report, and sent letters to parents stressing the importance of immunizations early on. In just a few years, the percentage of facilities that submitted reports rose to 100 percent from 62 percent, and the percentage of facilities with reports showing all children were up to date on immunizations rose to 96 percent, an exciting achievement and indicator of the dedicated and effective work of those involved. Given the critical importance of early childhood immunizations in reducing the spread of disease, this initiative has been at the forefront of Chatham's efforts to promote public health among some of the county's most vulnerable residents.

Cleveland County Public Health Center Virtual Care Clinic

At times, students cannot get to a pediatrician easily due to transportation issues or parental work conflicts. With an innovative approach using technology, Cleveland County has created a Virtual Care Clinic that brings everyone together. Using telemedicine technology, local pediatricians provide medical care for students ranging from skin infections and rashes to pink eye, asthma flares, stomach viruses, upper respiratory infections and the flu. The clinic has resulted in decreased emergency room use, increased school attendance and increased access to a primary medical home. Before the Virtual Care Clinic, the school nurse sent home one student for illness every 5.4 academic days. Using the clinic, the nurse sent home one student for illness every 10.7 academic days—a 50-percent reduction in absenteeism due to illness. Parents are relieved to have assistance in navigating the health care system and not having to take time off from work. The Virtual Care Clinic has brought better health and more peace of mind to families in Cleveland County.

Granville Vance Public Health Innovative Approaches

The sooner children with developmental disabilities are identified and helped, the better their chances at academic success. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides educational tools and resources through a program called “Learn the Signs. Act Early.” Granville Vance Public Health has created a novel partnership to engage parents by incorporating these materials into library story time programming and library outreach services to child care centers. This leads to early identification of possible developmental disabilities, which means that children can get needed services sooner. For instance, story time books such as *Where is Bear?* and *Amazing Me, It’s Busy Being Three!* are entertaining but more importantly, specifically address key milestones of development for two- and three-year olds. The stories give parents a better understanding of development for their child at this age in a fun and interactive way. The Innovative Approaches project will expand to pediatric dental practices in the next year, with resource bags containing a toothbrush, toothpaste, floss and information to connect families to resources regarding developmental delay concerns. Young children are getting the help they need at an earlier age—when it can make a big difference—thanks to the creativity, dedication and determination of staff at Granville Vance Public Health.

The Awards Program

The awards are designed to showcase exceptional and innovative programs that improve the lives of North Carolina’s children. This year’s awards focus on programs that address evidenced-based issues of particular significance to the community being served and work in partnership with others to help improve health outcomes for children. Key focus areas include asthma, dental health, environmental health (healthy homes), immunizations, low birth weight, mental health, nutrition and substance abuse, including drugs, alcohol and tobacco.

All nominees were recognized, and award recipients announced at a ceremony today in Charlotte during the North Carolina Public Health Association’s (NCPHA) annual fall meeting. The **Local Health Department Recognition Award** recognizes local health departments that have developed an innovative program that has produced measurable, sustainable outcomes.

The North Carolina GlaxoSmithKline Child Health Recognition Awards program was created in 1994 to recognize excellence and innovation in child health care and to encourage the development of creative, effective approaches in the field of public health.

The North Carolina GlaxoSmithKline Foundation supports activities that help meet the educational and health needs of today’s society and future generations. The Foundation focuses on programs that emphasize the understanding and application of health, science and education at all academic and professional levels.

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