

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 24, 2014

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Slusser recognized for leading innovative N.D. State Hospital telepharmacy project

BISMARCK, N.D. – Joan Slusser, director of pharmacy services at the North Dakota State Hospital, received the N.D. Pharmacists Association’s *Excellence in Innovation* award for her work leading the Department of Human Services’ telepharmacy project. Participating state pharmacy associations present the national award annually to honor pharmacists who display significant innovation in their practice that improves patient care.

Slusser developed a proposal and led the department’s efforts to adopt confidential, live internet-based video-conferencing technology and standard practices strengthening access to pharmacy services for people receiving behavioral health services at its eight regional human service centers. Lawmakers authorized funding for equipment and software for nine sites.

According to Field Services Director Alex Schweitzer, the program allows the State Hospital’s licensed, registered pharmacists to share their expertise with clients and human service center staffs in a way that promotes proper use of medications and prevents drug interactions. The pharmacists, he said, oversee the dispensing of prescribed medications, assure medications are properly labeled, review medication profiles, and can counsel patients about medications via video or telephone.

Slusser said, “The biggest benefit is that we are working more closely with nurses and pharmacy technicians at remote department sites to reduce interruptions in medication therapy and assure clients receive the medications they need to support their recovery.”

Slusser praised the North Dakota State University College of Pharmacy and the State Board of Pharmacy for their leadership in making telepharmacy services available in the public and private sectors and in helping meet the pharmacy needs of rural residents. She said she worked closely with the state board on implementation steps and licensing.

Slusser also commended her co-workers for making telepharmacy services possible. She and her colleagues handle 700-770 medication orders daily between the State Hospital, the regional human service centers, and the Off Main residential program in Fargo. Slusser has been employed by the State Hospital as a pharmacist since 2000, was named director of pharmacy services in 2006. She has a doctorate of pharmacy degree.

During state fiscal year 2012, the Department of Human Services provided behavioral health treatment services to 26,494 individuals at its eight regional human service centers, and the State Hospital cared for an average of 104 patients per day in its traditional services area.

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