

Morgan among '10 healthiest counties in Ga'

**M. Elizabeth Neal | Posted: Friday, April 13, 2012 9:53 am**

MADISON - A national health care study has ranked Morgan among the 10 healthiest counties in Georgia.

The annual "Health Care Rankings and Roadmaps" report by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation ranks counties across the nation in terms of health outcomes such as mortality (length of life) and morbidity (quality of life), giving each measure equal weight.

For the first time this year, the study additionally ranks counties according to health factors that contribute to outcomes, incorporating such factors as the health behaviors of a county's population (smoking, diet and exercise, alcohol use and sexual activity); access to and quality of a community's clinical care; social and economic factors (income, education levels, employment, family and social support and community safety); and physical environment, including environmental quality.

The intent of the new category is to encourage communities to improve factors that contribute to their citizens' health, according to authors of the report.

In terms of health outcomes, Morgan ranked 10th among Georgia's 159 counties. In terms of health factors that contribute to outcomes, the county also came in near the top of the list, at number 17.

Megan Morris, spokesman for Morgan Memorial Hospital, said the national report held few surprises for the local medical community. "It reaffirmed what we already knew, that as a community, we're blessed to live in a county with readily accessible and high quality health care services," she said.

Two of the areas the report noted involved mammography and treatment of diabetes, she noted. "We have very good education programs for diabetes, and MMH offers digital mammography services, which most rural hospitals don't. We're very fortunate in a small rural county to have those types of services."

She added that another focus of the study was primary care physicians, and the quality of clinical care available within communities. "We have excellent primary care physicians here, and we were happy to see that (validation)" she added.

Elsewhere in the Lake Country, neighboring Greene ranked 74th among Georgia's 159 counties in terms of Health Outcomes, and 63rd in terms of Health Factors. Putnam ranked 73rd - just ahead of Greene - in Health Outcomes, and 57th in Health Factors.

Neighboring Oconee County ranked third in terms of Health Outcomes, and second in the category of Health Factors.

Other counties in the top 10 in terms of Health Outcomes include Fayette, Forsyth, Cherokee, Gwinnett, Cobb, Columbia, Towns and Hall, according to the report.