Healthcare Reform, signed into law in March of 2010, mandated changes for how and where future health care will be delivered in the United States. A major concern is the ability of our healthcare system to accommodate and provide timely and affordable access for the 40 million uninsured Americans that will enter the health care system. For people living in rural areas, issues of access will be even greater. The 2011 IOM Report, “The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health,” further emphasizes that the role of Nursing in meeting the healthcare demands in our society. In order to address these initiatives, DNP students must be prepared to take on roles as leaders, team builders, evaluators, and practice innovators. DNP programs are seeking strategies to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and comfort needed to advocate for healthcare and thus enhance the care for underserved populations.

The mission of the DNP program at Old Dominion University (ODU) is to produce DNP providers that address national policy initiatives as advocates and innovators in healthcare. This is done through focused experiential learning in the practice setting. Students are given specific assignments to complete as part of their Practicum. Targeted competencies include: 1) developing, implementing, and evaluating practice-based programs that impact healthcare outcomes through interdisciplinary teamwork, 2) developing a business plan to address the needs of a population, and 3) providing leadership in the integration of healthcare technology.

This presentation will showcase three DNP students that significantly impacted the face of healthcare in their regions. The first student is a DNP prepared Midwife that brought midwifery practice to rural
Southwest Virginia. As a result of the practicum, the student was able to break down barriers thus enabling her to become the first midwife in this region. Her practicum experience included leading an interdisciplinary team of healthcare professionals in order to conduct her Capstone Project; working closely with the state Midwifery organizations in developing strategies to over the barriers to midwifery service; and demonstrating her competency as a healthcare professional. She is now mentoring a DNP student currently in the ODU DNP program. This student that will be the second midwife in this underserved region.

The second student opened a set fee clinic two months after she completed the DNP program. She describes herself as a business owner as well as a health care provider. Through her practicum, she conducted a SWOT analysis that addressed the need for such a clinic as well as the regulations that impacted her ability to establish her own business. She then developed a business plan that set the groundwork for opening the clinic. She is now able to provide care to the uninsured at a reduced set fee. In order to adhere to the Virginia state regulations that require supervision by a physician, she hired a physician to serve in a supervisory capacity.

The third student focused on providing quality care using telemedicine as an educational venue for patients in remote rural areas of Virginia. Through her Capstone Project, she developed, implemented (face-to-face and via telemedicine), and evaluated as educational program for elderly individuals at risk for stroke. She demonstrated that telemedicine education was as effective as face-to-face education. She is now active nationally in the American Telemedicine Association. Through her initiatives, she is demonstrating how experts at urban university hospitals can provide education in areas of the country where such expertise does not exist.