

## Talking About Mentorship at the Colorado Rural Health Center Spring Conference

Last week, I had the chance to speak at the Colorado Rural Health Center Spring Conference alongside someone who's been incredibly important in my journey — Rick Smith.

Rick has been much more than a mentor to me; he's been a guide, a trusted advisor, and someone who has consistently encouraged me to aim higher. Having the opportunity to sit down with him and share our story, and to talk about the role mentorship plays in rural healthcare, was meaningful.

During our session, we talked about how mentorship isn't just about giving advice — it's about listening, challenging, supporting, and showing up for someone over time. It's about building real trust and being willing to walk alongside someone as they grow. Rick shared insights about how intentional mentorship can combat the isolation many rural health professionals feel, and how having even one strong supporter can change the entire trajectory of a career.

I spoke about how Rick's mentorship gave me the confidence to take risks, to lead, and to eventually mentor others. The lessons I learned from Rick — about patience, persistence, and investing in people — are the same lessons I now try to pass on to those I mentor today. Paying it forward is one of the most rewarding parts of my work.

We also shared some practical takeaways for how to be a good mentor (and mentee): be consistent, be honest, set goals together, and don't be afraid to have hard conversations when they're needed. Most importantly, mentorship must be a two-way relationship based on respect and commitment.

The audience had some fantastic questions and ideas, and it was clear that mentorship is something our rural healthcare community deeply values and wants to strengthen.

I'm grateful to Rick for being the mentor he is — and for the opportunity to continue this important conversation. Rural health needs strong leaders, and strong leaders are almost always built through strong mentorship.

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