
News Release

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Ready to go rural: Future physicians receive hands on experience at Mayo Clinic Health System

LAKE CITY, Minn — It is no secret that the demand is high for quality health care providers in small towns and rural communities across the country. Yet, the supply often falls short. The Association of American Medical Colleges estimates the country will be short 90,000 doctors over all fields in the next 10 years.

In light of National Rural Health Day on November 21, 2013, Mayo Clinic Health System celebrates a unique approach that bridges medical teaching with potential recruitment for future physicians. The Rural Physician Associate Program (RPAP) at the University of Minnesota gives third-year medical students the opportunity to gain hands on experience and develop relationships with patients and providers in a rural setting. Students seeking a career in family medicine are submersed in the culture of a rural clinic or hospital for nine months instead of a six-week rotation in a metro area.

Emily Wolff, a 26 year-old medical student hailing from Lincoln, Neb., now living in Lake City, Minn., is participating in the program at Mayo Clinic Health System in Lake City and in Plainview. She began in October and has already found great value in learning what rural clinics and hospitals have to offer.

“The providers and staff in Lake City and Plainview have been fantastic to work alongside,” says Wolff. “I really like that each clinic is small enough that everyone knows who you are yet large enough to offer a wide range of care through collaboration,” says Wolff.

Several family medicine providers at Mayo Clinic Health System have participated in the program themselves, including Tom Witt, M.D. who is also now CEO of Mayo Clinic Health System in Cannon Falls, Lake City and Red Wing and their branch clinics in Wabasha, Plainview, Zumbrota, Alma, Wis., and Ellsworth, Wis.

“This is beneficial for both the student and the medical center they train at; it provides an opportunity to interact with future physicians while supplying them with valuable exposure to multiple areas of medical care,” says Dr. Witt. “It also highlights the trust and partnerships providers and their patients build together along with the chance to experience the many rewards of being a health care provider in a smaller community.”

Wolff will finish her training in Lake City next summer. Following her graduation and residency, she plans to practice family medicine in rural Minnesota.

National Rural Health Day highlights the unique health care challenges and opportunities in rural areas. More information can be found at celebratepowerofrural.org.

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Mayo Clinic Health System consists of Mayo-owned clinics, hospitals and other health care facilities that serve the health care needs of people in more than 70 communities in Georgia, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin. The community-based providers, paired with the resources and expertise of Mayo Clinic, enable patients in the region to receive the highest-quality health care close to home.