

Keeping Families Healthy While Teaching Students Valuable Skills

Sixty-six-year-old Bessie Lee wasn't having the best of days. As Lee sat among seven foster children whom she watched every afternoon — many of them playing Foosball — in her subsidized housing complex, she struggled to see. Her glasses had been accidentally broken, and she was just told that Medicaid would no longer cover the cost of a new pair.

However, Lee was comforted by Rhondda Waddell, educational coordinator for UF's Keeping Families Healthy Program. Waddell brought Lee a leg rest to attach to her wheelchair and also discussed alternative organizations that might be able to fund Lee's new glasses.

The Keeping Families Healthy Program began in 1995 with a small group of medical students and has since grown to include not only all first-year medical students but also nursing, pharmacy and clinical and health psychology students.

As a result, the program currently includes more than 425 students, 72 faculty members and 150 medically underserved families in Alachua County.

"These are students who by and large have been successful with schoolwork but most have never had a task like this," said Richard Davidson, MD, director of generalist education for the College of



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Richard Davidson, MD, and Rhondda Waddell

Medicine. "They go into areas they are not necessarily comfortable in and are challenged to work together."

As a result of its success, the program will receive part of a \$100,000 fund made available through the colleges of Dentistry, Health Professions, Medicine and Pharmacy to promote interdisciplinary education, Davidson said. Another major contributor to the program is the Area Health Education Centers system.

Students in the program are assigned to teams of three, and every team is made up of the three different disciplines.

Starting in fall 2003, dentistry students will join forces with the other disciplines and nursing students will no longer participate in the Keeping Families Healthy Program.

The interaction between the different disciplines is one of the overriding goals of the program. In fact, next year the name of the program will be changed to the Interdisciplinary Family Health Program to reflect this interaction.