

UF researcher receives grant to expand primary-care opportunities for medical students

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GAINESVILLE---Researchers at the University of Florida have received a three-year, \$300,000 federal grant to develop educational programs for medical students to increase their interest in practicing primary-care medicine.

"This grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Public Health Service will allow us to expand community-based, primary-care opportunities for our medical students," said Dr. Margaret Duerson, associate professor of community health and family medicine at UF's College of Medicine.

"The advent of health-care reform has made it very important for us to increase the number of medical students choosing careers in primary-care medicine."

Over the past several years, UF faculty members have revised the medical school's curriculum to include more general patient-care experiences in hopes the early association with strong primary-care role models will inspire students to specialize in pediatrics, internal medicine or family medicine.

Currently, first-year medical students at UF serve a three-week preceptorship with a primary-care physician at the end of their first semester. Duerson hopes this grant will enable the college to add a similar experience to the students' second year.

"We have proposed a second-year preceptorship that would give students a chance to continue improving their interviewing and physical examination skills in a hands-on setting," Duerson said.

"We hope these two experiences will create a bridge for the students between their first two years and the formal clerkships that begin in their junior year."

UF faculty members also are considering expanding the basic clinical skills course each first-year medical student takes and better coordinating it with the second-year physical diagnosis course.

In addition, Duerson hopes to use the grant to plan a new program that would pair each first-year medical student and a mentor with a North Central Florida family for the student's full four years.

Dubbed "Keeping Families Healthy," the program would allow students to interact with families in a home setting.

"This type of program could provide a rich experience for our students," Duerson said.

"It would allow the student to assist family members with their medical programs, health promotion/disease prevention and interact with appropriate social agencies."

Only time will tell if more medical students choose primary care as their area of future study as a result of these types of programs.

"We're tracking our students through their clinical experiences and curriculum to see if it's going to make a difference," Duerson said. "This grant allows us to provide more community-based experience."

Assisting Duerson in developing these educational programs are Dr. R. Whit Curry Jr., chairman of UF's department of community health and family medicine; Dr. Larry G. Rooks, clinical assistant professor of community health and family medicine and Dr. Richard Rathe, assistant professor of community health and family medicine.

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