

## University of Florida to expand community health service and education program

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For more information contact:

Paula Rausch, 352/392-2755, E-mail: [prausch@vpha.health.ufl.edu](mailto:prausch@vpha.health.ufl.edu)

GAINESVILLE --- With new financial support, the University of Florida is expanding a program that aids Gainesville-area families with their health-care needs while providing a valuable educational experience to Health Science Center students.

The Merck Company Foundation, a private New Jersey-based charitable organization dedicated to improving health care worldwide and advancing biomedical science training and education, will donate \$100,000 over the next two years to help expand the Keeping Families Healthy program to more students and families. The North Florida Health Education Center, through the community-based regional Suwannee River Area Health Education Center, will contribute \$25,000 toward the effort.

The initiative will grow this fall to include the more than 400 first-year students from the colleges of Medicine, Nursing and Pharmacy, 72 faculty members and 150 area families. During its initial two-year pilot, the program sent 27 first-year students in multidisciplinary teams to visit with local families that volunteered to participate.

Richard Davidson, M.D., M.P.H., an associate professor of medicine who administers the program, said the effort is unique in its combination of preventive medicine, home visits and a long-term interdisciplinary experience.

"Our hope is that this experience will give students a glimpse of the impact of environment on a family's health, expose them to the importance of community resources and at the same time demonstrate the significance of team practice in problem-solving," said Davidson, who also directs of the College of Medicine's Office of Generalist Education.

- "There are no other experiences in the curriculum that include longitudinal team instruction across college lines," he said.

Following an orientation meeting Sept. 25, teams of students will be sent into the community to talk with people about their health and social needs. The students will work with people from a broad cross section of the Gainesville area. They include families and individuals, children and seniors, and those who are healthy and chronically ill. Some are economically secure, but others have faced barriers to obtaining health care because of poverty.

To improve the health of each family member, the students will use the information they obtain over five home visits to develop a "prevention prescription," which could include diet and exercise advice, and help obtaining

social services.

In addition to College of Medicine involvement, faculty from the colleges of Nursing and Pharmacy have been instrumental in working to enhance the program's curriculum to emphasize the importance of team interaction among health professionals, Davidson said. Students in the pilot phase found the opportunity to work with those in other health fields particularly valuable.

Families can participate by calling 273-5321.