



# FSU College of Medicine students explore rural healthcare

Rachel Corry, Staff Writer

Published 10:54 a.m. ET June 26, 2018



(Photo: Courtesy of Glen Hodgson)

First-year College of Medicine students at Florida State University took part in the Rural Learning Experience (RuLE) on June 1 to explore rural healthcare facilities throughout north Florida and south Georgia.

The program is meant to introduce students to social and cultural health factors in rural areas, foster interdisciplinary learning and encourage relationship building with rural communities. The Florida Blue Foundation provides funds to sponsor RuLE trips.

When the program was launched in 2010, it was known as the Rural Education Orientation Program (REOP). The program was renamed RuLE in 2014 and was incorporated into the College of Medicine's curriculum redesign.

Dr. Anthony Speights is the assistant dean of interdisciplinary medical sciences and director of the Bridge to Clinical Medicine Master's Program. He instills the College of Medicine's unique goal of inspiring physicians and physician assistants to serve patients belonging to rural, minority and geriatric populations.

"Many of the students have never been exposed to rural areas nor do they know how rich and rewarding an experience can come from working in one," said Dr. Speights. "So, we take them on an old-fashioned field trip the very first week of school to give them direct insight into several of these communities."

Students researched the respective communities before visiting them to develop a baseline understanding of their unique healthcare needs. On the RuLE trip, students could visit a health department, senior center or Federally Qualified Health Center in the community they traveled to. Terri Johnson, medical informatics librarian at FSU, was the lead faculty coordinator for the trip this year.

"RuLE and many other learning opportunities for our students get them outside the classroom," Johnson said. "These opportunities promote their interest in becoming the physician who will provide care in one of the communities where there are unmet healthcare needs."

After participating in the RuLE field trip, the students reflected on how they were affected by their experiences. Kendall Hale visited the Grady General Hospital, Grady County Health Department and an assisted living facility in Cairo, Georgia.

Hale said her favorite part of the trip was “seeing how much the health care providers in Cairo care about their patients. It was such a rewarding experience to see that level of care and commitment.”

Kiah Hill was also part of the group who visited Cairo. She was particularly inspired by the efficiency, organization and passion of the staff at smaller medical facilities in Cairo that receive less funding than healthcare centers in urban areas.

“They make everything work despite lacking many resources,” said Hill. “The people in Cairo seemed to know the importance of what they were doing and loved to be a part of making a difference in their community. That is so important for new medical students like myself to see.”

Mitchell Darnell traveled to Quincy, Florida and toured a local hospital, as well as a Federally Qualified Health Center. Darnell is from a rural Panhandle community and found many similarities between Quincy and his hometown.

“I found the trip to be valuable in demonstrating how rural healthcare is representative of the resilience of the community,” said Darnell. “Rural medicine is characterized by limited resources, and most of the time, there is a large distance separating these smaller communities from the nearest ‘big city.’ I believe that this adds to the strength of the community in supporting itself.”

During their two years on campus, College of Medicine students are encouraged to continue reaching out to the community they visited during the RuLE trip. Opportunities like RuLE directly expose medical students to an area of work they may want to pursue after graduation.

“I think this trip opened the minds of many students to rural medicine,” said Hale. “One day, they might consider working in a rural area because of their initial interest from this experience.”