

## FSU pays rural health a visit

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BONIFAY — About 30 doctors-to-be paid a visit to Doctors Memorial Hospital and the health department on Friday to get a glimpse of what it might be like to be a provider in a rural setting.

“There essentially is not enough physicians in these rural areas,” said Tucker Retherford, medical student and Bonifay native who graduated from Holmes County High School in 2011.



The Florida State University College of Medicine Rural Education Opportunity Program, sponsored by the Florida Blue Foundation, sent first-year medical students on a tour of rural health care facilities across Northwest Florida to explore some of the issues and special needs of rural populations.

“A big reason I chose FSU is because their mission is to train rural family physicians,” said Retherford.

Students toured the clinic at the Florida Department of Health in Bonifay to see the public health environment. At DMH, students had the opportunity to speak with those already practicing in the rural setting.

Student Jason Waldman, who plans to go into psychiatry, wants help future patients navigate life’s hurdles and other mental health issues. He said he can see a need in rural communities for mental health resources provided by organizations like the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

“Ideally, I’d like to be in a place where we have amazing mental health awareness and support groups,” said Waldman.

Walden said he appreciates the emphasis on religious support in rural communities and would fortify it with mainstream mental health services.

Meeting all types of health care needs in a rural population are challenging due to the shortage of providers and funding. DMH has been active this year in educating not only future providers, but also legislators about rural health.

Rep. Gwen Graham visited DMH in February for a hospital tour and a meeting with the Florida Hospital Association’s rural health council. The following week, Graham went to Washington with a better understanding and message about how rural hospitals will be impacted if funding sources, such as the Low Income Pool, are cut from state budgets.

Rural health is continuously improving in Holmes County, especially with providers coming back to practice in their hometowns.

Retherford plans to practice internal or family medicine when he finishes medical

school.

“I really want to come back home,” he said.

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