

Curating Care



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FSU/BayCare Program's Inaugural Class of Residents Set Out on Mission

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Florida and especially Polk County have been experiencing a physician shortage for the past couple of decades. In fact, the entire nation is affected by a shortage of general practice physicians. Here in Florida, we have one primary care doctor for every 1,390 residents, and in Polk County that ratio plummets to one doctor for each 2,030 residents. This crisis in care has not gone unnoticed by professionals in the industry, as every three years BayCare Health System conducts a comprehensive Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) to determine our area's most significant health needs. Family medicine and psychiatry tend to be the two most difficult roles to adequately fill.

A growing and aging population in Florida adds increased stress on the local medical systems. Polk County has one of the fastest growing populations in the state. Recruitment of general practitioner physicians has simply not been able to keep up with the retirement of practicing doctors in the area over the years. Many medical students opt to go into specific specialties rather than general practice. Family medicine can be a challenge because these doctors are tasked with caring for their patients over long periods of time, often serving several generations of an individual's family. The family doctor oversees a variety of medical conditions including illnesses, injuries, births, and deaths. It takes a particularly dedicated type of physician to commit to this kind of long-term care.

For the past couple of years, BayCare's Winter Haven Hospital has been working with Florida State University's College of Medicine to establish a new residency program. The goal of the program is to attract more primary care physicians to the area, since a majority of doctors will start their practices within 100 miles of where they do their residencies, according to the American Medical Association. The new residency program recently welcomed its first crop of fresh residents, with six medical school graduates taking their places in the program in June and beginning their curriculum on July 1.

Leading the program is Dr. Nathan Falk, the founding Program Director and an Associate Professor for Florida State University. He talked to *Central Florida Doctor* about the program and residents.

"All six of them have ties to Florida," Falk says of the new residents. "Four out of the six grew up in Florida, one of whom grew up in Winter Haven." Of the other two, one has spent many years visiting Florida, and the other attended his last two years of medical school in the Sunshine State. Several of the new recruits have already expressed a desire to remain in the Central Florida area once their residency is complete.

Falk acknowledges that the purpose of developing the FSU/BayCare residency program is to attract more doctors to the area.

"The whole goal is to train people in a location so that they will stay there," he says. "Probably the number one indicator of where someone is going to practice after residency is where they do their residency training. Our goal is to get them into Winter Haven and into Polk County, and have them fall in love with the area, like many of us have, and choose to stay here to practice afterwards."

The residents will be seeing patients at BayCare Medical Group's Family Health Center in Winter Haven, and will treat patients on Medicare, Medicare Advantage, Medicaid, and commercial insurance. They will work with doctors from Winter Haven Hospital, Winter Haven Women's Hospital, Gessler Clinic, Bond Clinic, Central Florida Health Care, KSC Cardiology, and Messieh Orthopedic Clinic. They will also participate in rotations at Arnold Palmer Children's Hospital in Orlando. These experiences will help the residents create meaningful connections in the local medical community.

Residents are chosen for this program the same way as other residency programs, through the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP). This is a uniform, electronic system that allows candidates to choose their preferred residency programs while the programs are simultaneously reviewing applications and ranking their preferred candidates. Normally, onsite interviews are conducted to help candidates and program administrators determine who would be a good fit at each location. This year, the pandemic made that part of the process impossible. Virtual interviews took the place of in-person interviews for the sake of health and safety.

The residents chosen for the inaugural year of the FSU residency program are Dr. Marvin Dieujuste of Fort Lauderdale; Dr. Brian Greene of Reno, Nevada; Dr. Feisal Hamam of Paterson, New Jersey; Dr. Trevor Owens of Cocoa; Dr. Ravi Patel of Bonifay; and Dr. Dianna Pham of Winter Haven. As the new residents are joined in the future by additional groups of six each year, the goal is to have a total of 18 residents treating roughly 14,000 patients per year.

"The whole goal of the residency program is to improve access to high-quality health care and improve the lives of people here in Polk County," Falk says.

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