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FSU Med Students Head Out to Rural Hospitals

Dozens of Florida State medical students hit the road to learn more about living and working in small towns and rural communities.

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UPDATED June 2, 2011 6:40pm by Julie Montanaro

Busloads of medical students hit the highway this afternoon for what their professors call a critical field trip. FSU is trying to convince aspiring doctors to look beyond the big cities.

The FSU medical students boarding these buses aren't set to graduate for another four years. Yet on this fourth day of class, they are bound for small towns like Monticello, Perry, Madison, Bristol, and Blounstown. Cities that struggle to keep hospitals open and doctors on the payroll.

"It really is weird to me, like, not to have, you know, a hospital to go to or a doctor to go to because all my life I've had somebody that's close by," said FSU Medical Student Shalini Golla.

We followed a group to the Jefferson County Health Department. Doctors, nurses and dental technicians described patients with no insurance, little money and few options. They said many count on them for everything from immunizations to mamograms.

"What appeals to me? The fact that you get to know the patient more than anything else and in the bigger cities there's too many people. It's very hard to memorize every patient. It's very hard to get a personal one on one feel with that patient," said FSU medical student Fernando Guarderas.

FSU's Medical School is hoping these students will consider careers in small towns like these and so far its graduates are far outpacing the nation. 23% of FSU med school grads practice in rural areas compared to just 6% nationwide.

"This gives us a great opportunity to really make the mission of the college of medicine come alive. we have a mission that we're really trying to train the kind of doctors Florida really needs the most," said FSU Medical School Dean John Fogarty.

Dean Fogarty contends the kind of doctors that Florida needs most are those who are willing to work in rural and underserved areas.

Tallahassee, Florida - June 2, 2011 - Noon -

We'll have more on this story later on Eyewitness News.

Dozens of Florida State medical students will be hitting the road this afternoon. They'll be learning more about living and working in small towns and rural communities.

Students are boarding buses right now and fanning out to health departments and hospitals. They'll be visiting facilities in Taylor, Madison, Jefferson and Liberty and Calhoun counties.

The mission of FSU's Med School is to increase the number of primary care doctors. The annual trip for incoming freshman is designed to give them a sneak peek into those careers.

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