



Winter Haven Hospital Residency Program Delivers on Retainment Goals

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When the Winter Haven Hospital/Florida State University Family Medicine Residency Program launched in 2020, its goal was to address a physician shortage by retaining at least 50% of its graduates in Polk County.

The program has exceeded its goal and it shows no signs of slowing down. Nearly 80% of the 19 resident physicians who have graduated from the program since 2020 are now or soon will be practicing in Polk County, including six of the eight who graduated in June.

BayCare's mission is to improve the health of all we serve, so the health system has invested in training physicians through residency programs, including the Winter Haven Hospital/Florida State University Family Medicine Residency Program.

"Our program has grown so much in such a short amount of time," said Nathan Falk MD, MBA, FAAFP, founding director hired in 2018 to build and operate the program. "Our first class had six residents. Now there are eight

in each class, and we've added the Transitional Year program which brings 12 additional residents this year." The Transitional Year program is a one-year foundational program that prepares residents for diving into specialty studies.

Some residents hail from Florida, including a few from right here in Winter Haven. Dr. Kara Lanpher, for example, was born at Winter Haven Women's Hospital, and, during her rotations, found herself delivering babies in the same room where she was born. A recent graduate, she intends to practice locally. Dr. Dianna Pham graduated with the first class and after practicing locally for two years, is returning to the residency program as a faculty member later this year.

Others took a chance on Winter Haven, traveling a long way to advance their education and to serve this community.



Husband and wife physicians Drs. Christopher Jebailey and Alina Ladha matched together into the Winter Haven Hospital/Florida State University Family Medicine Residency Program after meeting in medical school.

Dr. Alina Ladha, who is originally from Toronto, met her now-husband, Dr. Chris Jebailey, while they were both in medical school at the Medical University of the Americas in St. Kitts and Nevis. When it was time to choose a residency program, the couple hoped to stay close together.

When they looked into the Winter Haven Hospital program, they learned that they could couples-match into the program. A couples-match is a possibility not just for significant others, but also for friends who want to attend residency together.

It didn't go unnoticed that two members of the current Winter Haven Hospital faculty are also a couple – Dr. Nathan Falk is married to Dr. Ashley Falk, MD, who is the director of the Transitional Year program. They called the doctors Falk a “big inspiration and role models for us,” Dr. Jebailey, said.

It's always hard to leave home, but Dr. Ladha said that when she and Dr. Jebailey visited Winter Haven, it felt like home. They were also drawn to the area due to the fact that the area was in need of family medicine physicians.

Having graduated this past June, they will both practice in Winter Haven. Dr. Ladha will work at the Cypress Gardens BayCare Medical Group location and Dr. Jebailey will be at the group's Cambridge Square location. Ten of the 19 Winter Haven Hospital/Florida State University Family Medicine Residency Program graduates chose to stay in the BayCare system.



Dr. Nathan Falk, founding director of the Winter Haven Hospital/Florida State University Family Medicine Residency Program, delivered remarks at the program's 2025 graduation ceremony, held June 14 at Nora Mayo Hall in Winter Haven, Florida.

Another achievement the program can boast: 100% passing rate on the board exams, a standardized test that assesses a physician's knowledge.

“The fact that we've been able to do that is pretty phenomenal,” said Dr. Nathan Falk. Maintaining a high board exam passage rate is a major consideration for the program to retain accreditation by the Accreditation Council on Graduate Medical Education (ACGME).

Dr. Nathan Falk is excited as a new residency year begins with eight new family medicine and 12 transitional year residents.

“We expect to continue training excellent doctors and keeping as many of them in this area as possible,” he said.

Provided by BayCare
