

Medical students get a dose of family medicine

OHSU's Rural Family Medicine Experience gets students out of the city and into clinics

By Jennifer Willis

This summer, Miranda Devine spent a week shadowing Dr. Tami Rodgers, a family physician in Newberg. Devine, currently in her second year of medical school, was one of 19 students participating in this year's Rural Family Medicine Experience through OHSU.

"I've never seen a birth before," Devine says. "I actually got to see two births and a C-section. That was awesome."

OHSU's Rural Family Medicine Experience started five years ago to offer clinical experience to students during the summer between the first and second years of medical school.

"They spend a whole week, and they're in the clinic every day with the physician," says Peggy O'Neill, Community Outreach Coordinator for Family Medicine at OHSU and Coordinator of the Rural Family Medicine Program.

O'Neill says the program isn't intended to attract new physicians to rural areas.

"It's more answering a desire by the students to have a more in-depth, clinical experience," she says. "They're also learning what life is like for a community physician."

Students participating in the Rural Family Medicine Experience pay a fee of \$60 and receive one elective credit. Beyond that, students are responsible only for travel expenses to their assign-



ment.

"Most of the physicians pick up the entire cost," O'Neill says. "They house the students, and most of them pay for their food while they're living with them."

The hosting physicians volunteer for the program. Each winter, O'Neill sends 200 letters to prospective physicians, and typically 25 percent are available to participate the following summer.

When she was looking at medical schools, Devine interviewed at a number of institutions around the country. One

reason she settled on OHSU was the Rural Family Medicine Experience, which she'd heard about from a second-year OHSU medical student.

"She said this program was just amazing. You don't get anything like it," Devine says. "I jumped into it. I gotta do this program I heard so much about."

Matching students to physicians

Once a student decides to participate, O'Neill works hard to match the student's interests with an available physician.

"I was set up with a female doctor who does OB, and her husband does sports medicine, which was perfect for me because I'm interested in both aspects," Devine says.

A typical day found Devine at Dr. Rodgers' clinic by 7 a.m., though some days began even earlier when an induction or C-section was scheduled.

Dr. Rodgers' clinic is open until noon, when they'd break

for lunch. Devine spent the afternoons shadowing other physicians while Dr. Rodgers spent time with her children. In the evening, Devine headed back to Rodgers' home for dinner with the family. Sometimes they'd go horseback riding.

"I got to talk with them both as physicians, just kind of pick their brains about lifestyle and what made them choose family practice," Devine says. "You get to live and breathe their life, do whatever they do. It was fun."

O'Neill says that while the students are getting great clinical experience in an active practice, they're also getting a first-hand look at family medicine.

"Nowadays, a lot of students come out of school somewhere between \$100,000 and \$200,000 in debt," O'Neill says. "The salaries in family medicine are generally not as high as they would be in a sub-specialty. They still might make an excellent salary, but they're not making the same salary as say, an orthopedic

surgeon in Portland."

Devine was surprised by how much she enjoyed family medicine. Previously, she'd been considering other specialties like physical medicine rehabilitation, ER and anesthesiology.

"It surprised me that they still are able to have so much of a family life," says Devine, who'd expected the life of a rural family physician to have no boundaries. "I can still live how I want to live and not be tied to being a doctor at every moment."

"Ideally, we'd like students to have a greater appreciation for the role of the family physician in the community," O'Neill says. "We'd like students to improve their skills and develop confidence, and for the student and the physician to develop a lifelong relationship."

O'Neill says several students who have participated in the Rural Family Medicine Experience and in OHSU's Summer Observership for incoming first-year students have returned after graduation to go into practice with their host physicians.

Devine says she would recommend the program to other students.

"You have a long journey to becoming a physician," she says. "You can learn things every second along the way."

Devine says this program exposed her to situations — like those three deliveries — that she wouldn't otherwise have gotten until later in medical school.

"It came down to trying to figure out what I wanted to do, where I want to practice, and is family medicine with OB what I want to do or not?" Devine says about her time with Dr. Rodgers and her husband. "I was able to see every aspect of their life. That shows me that I get to pick out what I don't like and what I do like. I think that alone is going to help me be a better physician."

Laurelhurst Physical Therapy Clinic

www.Laurelhurstpt.com

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