

**UAMS News Bureau**

Office of Communications & Marketing  
4301 West Markham # 890  
Little Rock, AR 72205-7199

[uamshealth.com/news](http://uamshealth.com/news)



**News Release  
Sept. 11, 2019**

**Media Contacts:**

Leslie W. Taylor, 501-686-8998  
Wireless phone: 501-951-7260  
[leslie@uams.edu](mailto:leslie@uams.edu)

Liz Caldwell, 501-686-8995  
Wireless phone: 501-350-4364  
[liz@uams.edu](mailto:liz@uams.edu)

**North Little Rock Resident Olivia Brasher Receives Scholarship  
to Pursue Primary Care in Rural Arkansas**

LITTLE ROCK — Olivia Brasher of North Little Rock, a junior medical student at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS), has been awarded a \$20,000 Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield Primary Care Scholarship, which encourages aspiring physicians to pursue primary care practices in rural Arkansas.

Brasher graduated from North Little Rock High School and received her undergraduate degree from Hendrix College in Conway. Although she has lived in central Arkansas her entire life, she gained experience in family medicine in Helena-West Helena, and is interested in practicing pediatrics in a rural community in Northwest Arkansas.

“In getting to know Helena-West Helena and its people, I witnessed the struggles that community faces and how much medical care can vary in different areas,” she said. “I learned the tremendous measures that some take to receive proper medical care, and how others who aren’t able to take those measures often suffer for it. After that experience, I became more open to serving in a rural area.”

Brasher’s own experiences as a patient with her family pediatrician inspired her to become a doctor. “I want to create that same familial environment, the one I have yet to find outside of primary care, while providing quality holistic care for my patients,” she said.

Arkansas Blue Cross, the state’s largest insurer, established the endowed scholarship in 2010 with a \$1 million gift to the UAMS Foundation Fund.

The scholarship is part of a broad effort to produce more family medicine, general internal medicine and general pediatrics doctors for Arkansas, especially in rural areas where access to primary care is limited. More than two-thirds of Arkansas’ 75 counties include federally designated Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Areas.

###

Primary care physician shortages are expected to increase substantially as the state's population continues to age and require more medical care, and as more Arkansans, now insured as a result of health insurance expansion, seek primary care services.

The College of Medicine has worked with private partners such as Arkansas Blue Cross to increase scholarships. The high cost of medical school and the burden of educational debt that most medical students face when entering their postgraduate residency training can be a factor in choosing higher-paying specialties instead of primary care and practicing in rural areas. The average medical school debt of recent UAMS graduates who have educational debt is about \$195,000.

"Scholarships reduce debt concerns for outstanding students like Olivia who want to make a difference in a rural community in Arkansas, and allow them to focus on their education and becoming an excellent physician," said Christopher T. Westfall, M.D., FACS, executive vice chancellor of UAMS and dean of the College of Medicine. "We are very thankful for Arkansas Blue Cross's investment in our students and our state."

"At Arkansas Blue Cross, we see the challenges rural Arkansans face with getting needed medical services, and we are committed to improving access to quality health care throughout our state," said Curtis Barnett, president and chief executive officer. "This scholarship addresses a small part of that need. We congratulate Olivia on this year's award and commend her for her desire to serve rural Arkansans."

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. It is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. *U.S. News & World Report* named UAMS Medical Center the state's Best Hospital; ranked its ear, nose and throat program among the top 50 nationwide; and named six areas as high performing — cancer, colon cancer surgery, heart failure, hip replacement, knee replacement and lung cancer surgery. UAMS has 2,727 students, 870 medical residents and five dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children's Hospital, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit [www.uams.edu](http://www.uams.edu) or [www.uamshealth.com](http://www.uamshealth.com). Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

Like us, we're social:    

###