

UAMS News Bureau

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**Bono Resident Drake Cullum Receives Scholarship to Pursue
Primary Care in Rural Arkansas**

LITTLE ROCK — Drake Cullum of Bono, a senior 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.

Cullum graduated from Westside High School in Jonesboro and received his undergraduate degree from Arkansas State University in Jonesboro. His family history on both side dates back several generations in northeast Arkansas. He plans to practice family medicine in one of the counties in either northeast or south Arkansas, depending on greatest need.

Since his freshman year, Cullum has been keenly interested in rural primary care, and has consulted with multiple family practice doctors and hospital administrators to better understand recruiting and retention in rural Arkansas as well as the needs of patients there.

“I can’t say I have pinpointed a specific area, but I am willing to go wherever there is a need,” Cullum said. “I love Arkansas, and with my long family ties and wonderful experiences growing up here, I wouldn’t look anywhere else to practice.”

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 a 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.

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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 Drake 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 Drake on this year's award and commend him for his 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 or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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