

UAMS News Bureau

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Texarkana Resident Kristen Rice Receives Scholarship to Pursue Primary Care in Rural Arkansas

LITTLE ROCK — Kristen Rice of Texarkana, 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.

Rice graduated from Genoa Central High School and received her undergraduate degree from Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas. She is the only living college graduate in her immediate family. She intends to pursue a career in general pediatrics in southwest Arkansas.

“I greatly desire to work in the rural areas of Arkansas that need physicians the most, specifically southwest Arkansas,” Rice said. “I am very familiar with the primary care physicians there and have had many conversations about how to reach the patients most in need. I look forward to continuing those conversations in the coming years after I move back and start my own practice there, dedicated to serving the less fortunate and often overlooked rural population.”

Rice has extensive experience working at Grace Clinic in Texarkana and the UAMS 12th Street Health & Wellness Center in Little Rock. Her experiences at these clinics have helped solidify her decision to serve patients in greatest need.

“I have seen the firsthand value of providing primary care to the patients that need it the most,” she said. “The best reward for long hours at the clinic is the simple but sincere and genuine ‘thank you’ that comes from patients desperate for a helping hand from someone who cares.”

Arkansas Blue Cross, the state’s largest health 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.

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, in partnership with the Division of Institutional Advancement, 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.

“We greatly appreciate Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield’s continued investment in our students and our efforts to produce much-needed primary care physicians for rural Arkansas,” said Christopher T. Westfall, M.D., executive vice chancellor of UAMS and dean of the College of Medicine. “Scholarships help reduce the burden of debt for future physicians like Kristen who want to serve in Arkansas communities where they are needed most.”

“Arkansas Blue Cross recognizes that people in rural parts of our state benefit greatly from better access to quality health care,” said Curtis Barnett, Arkansas Blue Cross president and chief executive officer. “That is part of the motivation behind this scholarship. We congratulate Kristen on receiving this 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. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS' clinical enterprise including its hospital, regional clinics and clinics it operates or staffs in cooperation with other providers. UAMS 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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