

UAMS News Bureau

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

uamshealth.com/news



**News Release
Sept. 2, 2020**

Media Contacts:

Leslie W. Taylor, 501-686-8998
Wireless phone: 501-951-7260
leslie@uams.edu

David Wise, 479-713-8679
Wireless phone: 501-259-1628
dwise@uams.edu

**UAMS Receives \$750,000 for Rural Residency Program
in Northwest Arkansas**

FAYETTEVILLE – A \$750,000 federal grant will allow the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) and local hospitals to develop a rural training track (RTT) for its family medicine residency program so it can graduate up to four additional medical residents a year.

The RTT will be connected to the long-standing UAMS family medicine residency in Northwest Arkansas and build on partnerships with Washington Regional Medical Center and Mercy Hospital.

The Rural Residency Planning and Development grant is from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). The first two years will be spent designing the RTT and obtaining accreditation. After an accreditation process, the first group of residents will start the program in July 2023.

Residents in the program will complete their first year at Washington Regional Medical Center in Fayetteville and spend the majority of years two and three in Carroll County at Mercy-Berryville Hospital and rural Washington Regional and Mercy family practice clinics.

Ronald Brimberry, M.D., will serve as program director. Brimberry served as interim director of the current family medicine residency program for one year, and as core faculty in the program for 20 years. He is a graduate of UAMS (both medical school and residency) and has taught medical students and residents since 1984.

“This program is to help recruit and retain well-trained family physicians who will understand the needs of people in rural Arkansas communities and encourage these new family physicians to stay and practice in those rural communities,” Brimberry said. “We are very excited to have been awarded this federal HRSA rural residency development grant to get started on a new, fully accredited RTT opportunity for family medicine residency training.”

Due to a long-standing federal cap on funding to add resident training slots, the UAMS family medicine residency program has not been able to grow to meet the needs of Northwest Arkansas for training and retaining family physicians in the region for many years.

The HRSA grant will help alleviate that long-standing problem, and is in keeping with a plan developed by the Northwest Arkansas Council to expand graduate medical education training programs in the region.

“The RTT program will allow the current UAMS family medicine residency program to expand opportunities for more elective training for all of our residents and provide better care to the citizens of Northwest Arkansas,” Brimberry said. “But most importantly, it specifically provides a dedicated rural training track for new residents to learn all about rural practice in Northwest Arkansas.”

Residents will receive rural inpatient experience, ambulatory clinical experience, and experience working at rural outpatient clinics, preparing them to serve in rural communities.

“This program will not only increase the number of residents in the state overall, it will increase the number of doctors in rural areas of the state,” said David Ratcliff, chief medical officer at Washington Regional Medical Center. “This will reduce workforce shortages overall and increase access to care for all Arkansans.”

Arkansas is a predominantly rural state with significant health disparities. Forty-two percent of Arkansans live in rural areas, compared to 15% of the U.S. population. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, rural Americans are more likely to die from the five leading causes of death than urban Americans. Many deaths among rural Americans are linked to lifestyle issues, obesity, inactivity, and mental and physical distress and are potentially preventable. This includes deaths due to heart disease, cancer, unintentional injuries, chronic lower respiratory disease, and stroke.

“It is essential that we expand Arkansas’s rural healthcare workforce and expand access to care in rural areas,” said Eric Pianalto, president of Mercy Hospital Northwest Arkansas. “Building the physician workforce in rural areas of north and Northwest Arkansas will provide much-needed medical resources for these communities and will improve health outcomes for the region and the state.”

The curriculum will emphasize experiences unique to rural clinical practice, including practicing high-quality medicine with limited resources, emphasizing interprofessional team-based care, specialty digital health, and education in the social determinants of health and culturally sensitive care.

“The overarching aim is to strengthen the physician workforce for rural underserved communities by training and supporting practitioners who have a passion for serving in rural areas,” said Pearl McElfish, Ph.D., vice chancellor for the UAMS Northwest Regional Campus and principal investigator for the grant. “UAMS is committed to making healthcare accessible close to home for all Arkansans, and this rural residency program will help make that possible.”

UAMS has made Arkansas the third best state in the nation for retaining physicians trained in state. The vast majority (80.9%) of the physicians who complete both medical school and a residency through UAMS choose to stay in Arkansas to practice medicine.

Therefore, it is expected that at least 80% of the primary care physicians who complete the RTT in Carroll County will stay in the region to practice. This will help increase the number of primary care physicians to meet the acute need and the increasing need as current primary care physicians retire.

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.

The UAMS Northwest Regional Campus includes 275 medical, pharmacy, nursing and health professions students, 66 medical and pharmacy residents, 2 sports medicine fellows, and 1,000 community-based faculty. The campus has nine clinics including a student-led clinic and physical, occupational and speech therapy. Faculty conduct research to reduce health disparities. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

Like us, we're social:    

###