



Community health center to help train a new breed of doctors

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Medical students will begin training at a new medical center in the Lowcountry this fall.

As one of 10 community health centers nationwide partnering with Arizona-based A.T. Still University in its new approach to medical school, Beaufort-Jasper-Hampton Comprehensive Health Services will have 10 medical students shadowing physicians and taking classes via laptops and video feeds.

"This (program) is intended to get physicians in the areas of the country where they are needed most," said A.T. Still assistant provost Gary Cloud.

The new program, which has not been named, places 10 second-year A.T. Still medical students in community health centers while they will continue their medical training, Cloud said.

Traditionally, medical students spend their first two years in the classroom.

"(Methods of teaching) are changing and going back to the healing, caring focus," said LaFrance Ferguson, one of the doctors involved in the program locally. She said medicine has become more clinical and can be perceived as uncaring. This program focuses on creating physicians who are caregivers and healers.

Ferguson said that the traditional way of teaching is changing as people realize the next generation of doctors learn differently and that there are more effective ways of learning.

"People learn better in context," Ferguson said. Faith Polkey, a doctor with the Comprehensive Health Services who will be the lead facilitator and assistant professor, said the new program is a compilation of several models trying to change the way people in the medical profession are educated.

Those involved at the instructional level said they are looking forward to the learning opportunity as

Each fall, Comprehensive Health Services will receive 10 more students who will continue their education in the Lowcountry. The center has eight locations in three counties, focused on primary care or family practice.

Roland Gardner, executive director of Comprehensive Health Services, said the medical school program will also serve as a recruitment tool because it exposes students to community health with the hope they will find it rewarding and stay in the area. According to the S.C. Office of Rural Health, the Lowcountry is underserved in regard to the number of physicians.

"There's still a shortage, and there will remain a shortage because the kids coming out of medical school aren't going into primary care as much as specialty care," said Mark Griffin, director of rural health recruitment.

Polkey said the students can follow patients through the entire treatment and understand what they will do on a daily basis as a doctor.

"They will get an idea of what it really is like," Ferguson said.

In a community health center, patients express gratitude and doctors get a sense of making a difference in someone's life.

"It's about getting people exposed in terms of the community," Polkey said. "Hopefully it will get more people interested (in community health)."

And those involved said there is benefit to the community as well.

Cloud said in communities with medical students participating in health care, the knowledge base keeps improving and that is a benefit to the community. "The standard gets moved up in the community as everyone learns," he said.

"The opportunity to have a training medical center says a lot for the growth and opportunities here," Gardner said.