

*f*ifty years ago, the University of Nebraska Medical Center began the rural preceptorship program. It was designed to offer third-year medical students the opportunity to practice medicine in a rural setting. Since its inception, more than 3,000 medical students and 1,000 physicians have participated in the program.

Paul Paulman, M.D., director of the family medicine preceptorship, said the program requires third-year students to train in a community outside of Lincoln or Omaha for eight-weeks.

"I believe it is important for medical schools to provide

student from Fremont, completed her rural preceptorship training there earlier this spring under the direction of Thomas McKnight, M.D.

"In some respects, the rural rotation was better than others because I was given more responsibility and allowed to treat a number of conditions," she said.

While on rotation, Svitak treated approximately 30 patients a day both on her own and with the assistance of Dr. McKnight.

"I saw a variety of cases including lacerations that resulted from work injuries at the local plant, an unusually high number of adult patients who were diagnosed with mono, patients with hidden cancers, farm injuries and a number of other conditions," she said.

Dr. McKnight is one of 134 preceptors who participate in Nebraska's program. Each year, the preceptors as a group spend more than 50,000 hours with medical students.

"Our preceptors give their time voluntarily to promote the education of future physicians," Dr. Paulman said. "In addition, they house and feed our students."

He said students gain a variety of experiences, from diagnosing and treating ear infections to delivering babies. They also improve their communication skills with patients and their families, learn the business side of managing a health-care practice and learn about the people of the community.

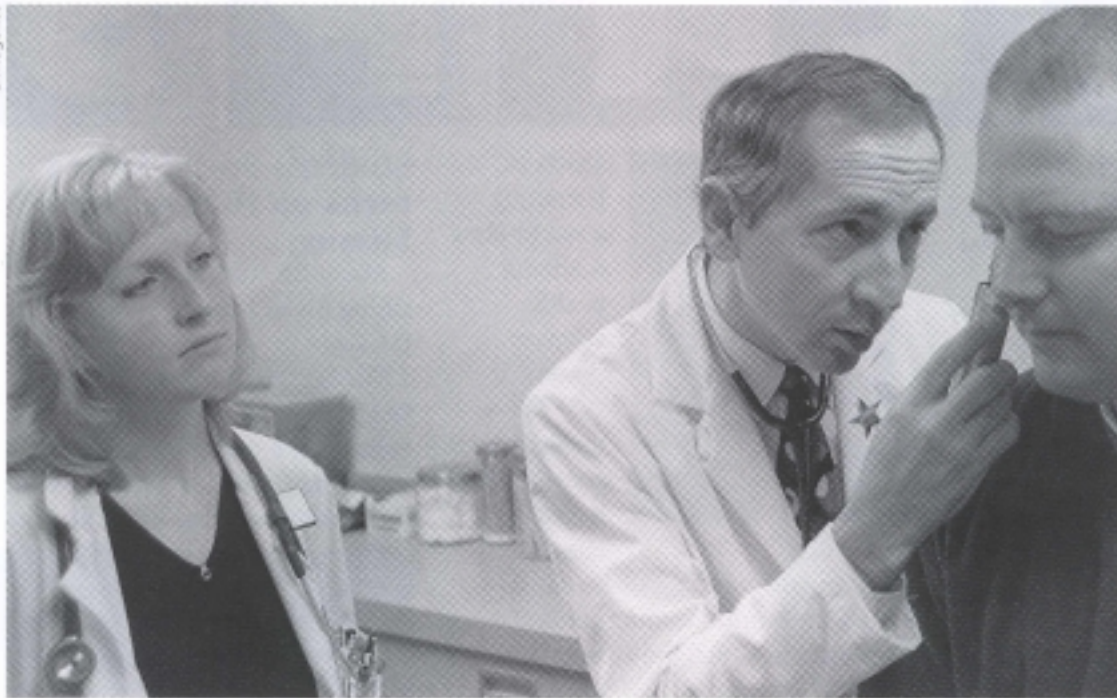
"Learning the business side of private practice is something we



by Lindsay Willis

a rural, primary care training experience," he said. "This is especially true in Nebraska where many of the people in our state live in medically underserved rural and urban areas."

Fremont, Neb., is one of the 58 rural communities in the program. Misty Svitak, a third-year medical



Svitak observes the work of her preceptor Dr. Thomas McKnight during her eight-week rural rotation in Fremont.

never explored in the classroom. It was a benefit I would have otherwise had to learn on my own," Svitak said.

Students consistently rate the experience the most valuable clinical experience of their training, Dr. Paulman said.

"In a rural preceptorship, the students don't have to compete to see patients and do procedures," he said.

"They experience more breadth and volume in what they see. They may get the opportunity to be first assistant on surgery and care for patients in many settings."

The preceptors benefit as well.

"The biggest value we get is to see students mature," said K.C. Bagby,

M.D., a physician who for 35 years has been with the Blair Clinic in Blair, Neb. "When the students arrive, you see they are questioning themselves, but by the time they leave they have grown in self-confidence."

keep up with new information as much as possible," Dr. Hanlon said.

For more information call (402) 559-6818. *d*

Robert Hanlon, M.D., of the Chadron Medical Clinic in Chadron, Neb., said he and his colleagues enjoy the experience.

"It is a delightful reward as a preceptor to be able to help these young students. As preceptors, we benefit by their presence in that the students tend to bring new ideas and information to us and it helps us in our never-ending quest to

Nebraska Rural Preceptor Sites



This map identifies the 99 communities in Nebraska who currently serve as hosts for UNMC's rural preceptorship program. More than 130 preceptors volunteer their time to participate in the program. Preceptors provide a clinical training facility for students from the UNMC Colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy and the School of Allied Health Professions. Students experience real-life clinical situations in rural settings through the clinics.