

Rural Health Initiatives

Students help address rural health care needs

Two-thirds of Nebraska's 1.7 million people reside in the eastern one-fourth of the state. Service to the western three-fourths of the state presents a unique challenge that UNMC willingly and enthusiastically addresses.

Through the [Rural Health Education Network \(RHEN\)](#), UNMC expands students' opportunities for education and training throughout Nebraska.

Rural rotations. Most UNMC students, during their clinical training, participate in a rural rotation under the direction of a volunteer preceptor. These students are encouraged to participate in community health activities at underserved clinics and with the local junior and senior high schools in these communities.

Rural Health Opportunities Program (RHOP). This initiative is a collaborative effort between UNMC, Wayne State College and Chadron State College. WSC and CSC students who complete their undergraduate studies are admitted into participating UNMC programs.

- By October 2006, 478 students had enrolled in RHOP
- 290 RHOP students in nine different programs have graduated from UNMC
- 51.8 percent of those not currently enrolled in a medical residency are practicing in rural Nebraska
- Another 16.2 percent practice in rural areas in nearby states
- These professionals include dentists, dental hygienists, pharmacists, clinical laboratory scientists, physician assistants, physical therapists, physicians, radiation sciences professionals and nurses

Family Medicine Residency Program Rural Training Track. Established in 1991, this rural training program is now the largest in the nation. Volunteer and paid preceptors in rural communities are the key to its success.

The rural training track is designed to prepare medical students, especially those with rural backgrounds, for rural practice and increase the likelihood that they will choose rural areas in their careers. The residents do their first year of training Omaha, then do their second and third years at one of five rural sites across the state: Norfolk, Grand Island, Kearney, North Platte or Scottsbluff.

- Through October 2006, there have been 69 graduates
- 47 of these graduates are currently practicing in rural Nebraska
- Nine are practicing in rural settings in surrounding states

Student/Resident Experiences and Rotations in Community Health (SEARCH). In September 2004, the University of Nebraska Medical Center's Rural Health Education Network was funded through HRSA to be a program site for the National

Health Service Corps Student/Resident Experiences and Rotation in Community Health (NHSC-SEARCH). This program will allow expansion of the current opportunities available for health professions students and NHSC scholars to receive clinical training in underserved sites. In addition to the clinical training with qualified volunteer preceptors, the students/residents will engage in community service projects with other students rotating in the communities serving minority, migrant, native, and geriatric populations.

Career Day. This activity began in 1998 when a group of UNMC students from rural areas decided to raise awareness among young rural students about the opportunities in the health care professions. It has been an annual affair at UNMC ever since. The occasion allows each participating rural school to bring up to five students to spend a day with UNMC students and faculty. More than 200 students participate each year from more than 45 rural schools within a three-hour drive of Omaha. The event is sponsored with the UNMC Student Association for Rural Health (SARH).

Agro-Medicine Workshop. This weeklong program provides the opportunity for up to 20 undergraduate students in health-related fields to visit UNMC and learn about issues affecting rural citizens. The curriculum includes topics such as:

- Farm safety
- Stress in rural life
- Environmental farm and ranching concerns
- Community health and safety promotion

The workshop gives students the opportunity to shadow rural health professionals (within a 2½-hour drive of Omaha), learn teamwork, and improve presentation skills.

Eighth Grade Health/Science Meet. Since 1993, more than 3,000 eighth-graders from across Nebraska have participated in regional science meets. Up to 80 students per year are selected from the regional meets to attend the state 2½-day meet on the UNMC campus each June.

Alumni participants meet every other year. Students are tracked to analyze their career paths.

Cultural Competency Workshop. In 2002, RHEN began this weeklong workshop on cultural competency for pre-health professional students of Nebraska undergraduate schools. This weeklong didactic workshop has a research component and a 9-12 hour practicum to be completed at an underserved clinic. The overall goal of the workshop is to educate pre-health students about the growing diversity of Nebraska communities and what this means for healthcare providers.