

FALL 2022

RURAL HEALTH UPDATE

PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTION

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Preceptor Spotlight

DR. ALYSON LEO

Tucked in the Appalachian Mountains and along part of the Monongahela National Forest in Randolph County, WV is the town of Elkins. This is where medical student preceptor Dr. Alyson Leo is a Family Medicine doctor at Valley Health Care providing care for the rural community. Valley Health Care is a FQHC (Federally Qualified Health Center) with two locations in Mill Creek, WV and Elkins, WV. Dr. Leo is from Elkins and had planned to practice in a rural underserved area. She began her health profession journey at WVU, but it wasn't until Dr. Leo participated in the WVU Rural Track Program and became a Rural Scholar that she solidified her choice to return to her hometown of Elkins to practice family medicine. Dr. Alyson Leo is an awardee of the WVU Institute for Community and Rural Health Service Program which assists in relieving financial burdens for those that commit to practicing in a rural/underserved area of WV.



As a new primary care doctor in a rural area, she sees a little bit of everything. When asking Dr. Leo about the benefits of being a rural provider, she shares that you know the people in your community, their demographic, environment, there is a level of trust, and the patient/doctor relationships feel valued. She can have genuine conversations with her patients about their health and give them the health education that meets the patient's needs. These relationship dynamics, patient education and health maintenance are important to Dr. Leo and she feels that this type of care supports quality over quantity. She's able to work with the pharmacy next door and has a referral system if/when needed. Plus, she can provide direct inhouse resources for patients that are underinsured.

In Dr. Leo's free time she and her goldendoodle pup, Chole, enjoy hikes in the surrounding scenic areas and visiting with family. She balances work and life by setting her schedule and priorities to fit her needs. Dr. Leo encourages health profession and medical students to go beyond the geographical area near their campus for clinical rotations. The different experience is worth venturing out and exploring!

If you are a medical student interested in a community-based rural rotation, please contact your campus coordinator to find out more. If you are a healthcare provider in a rural area and want to become a preceptor for future healthcare providers, please contact Molly Linkous at WVU Institute for Community and Rural Health, mlinkous@hsc.wvu.edu.

WVU is an EEO/Affirmative Action Employer — Minority/Female/Disability/Veteran. The WVU Board of Governors is the governing body of WVU. The Higher Education Policy Commission in West Virginia is responsible for developing, establishing and overseeing the implementation of a public policy agenda for the state's four-year colleges and universities. (213008)

Award

2022 CHANCELLOR'S AWARD FOR ADMINISTRATIVE/MANAGERIAL:



SANDRA Y. POPE, MSW, DIRECTOR OF WV AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTERS, CHARLESTON CAMPUS

NOMINATED BY: WVU INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY AND RURAL HEALTH

The purpose of the Chancellor's Awards for Outstanding Achievement is to honor staff members for an outstanding job performance at the WVU Health Sciences Center. The design of this program has been guided by the desire to promote inclusiveness by faculty and staff at WVU Health Sciences, to recognize equally the contributions made by faculty and staff, to value both personal achievement and contributions to the success of team-based activities, and to foster accomplishments that contribute to the overall success of our community.

Sandra Pope, MSW has been involved in rural health policy and program development initiatives for over 40 years, both in West Virginia and on a national level. She has an in-depth understanding of the needs of rural underserved and minority populations and strives to define issues and work with others to develop solutions to the challenges of the geographically disadvantaged populations throughout the state. Sandra graduated from West Virginia State College in 1976 with an Associate of Science in Social Work, going on to receive her Bachelor of Science in

Social Work in 1978. She completed her Master of Science in Social Work at Ohio State University in 1980.

Sandra is recognized as an expert in rural health, recruitment, and health professions education within the state and nationally. She was a founding member and first President of the West Virginia Rural Health Association and has served on the conference planning, policy, and other committees for many years. Additionally, she is a champion for West Virginia's youth through her work with the West Virginia Health Sciences and Technology Academy (HSTA). Sandra chairs the HSTA Joint Governing Board and serves on the Kanawha Local Governing Board. She is a national leader, representing West Virginia in the National Rural Health Association through her service as past member of the Board of Trustees, Rural Multiracial & Multicultural Health Council, and the Government Affairs Committee. She also serves as a member of the Statewide Health Resources Constituency Group. Other national service includes being a past member of the Board of Directors and past Chair of the Program Director's Constituency Group Leadership Committee for the National AHEC Organization. She currently serves as the federally appointed Chair of the Advisory Committee on Interdisciplinary Community-Based Linkages (ACICBL).

Along with her many skills, passions, abilities and dedication, Sandra works tirelessly, going above and beyond what is required for her position as WV AHEC Director. She provides excellent customer service and responds quickly to requests even during evening hours and weekends. Service to others is of paramount importance to her. Sandra is a compassionate and responsive supervisor to her staff, providing the tools, training, and encouragement needed for success. She makes sure the team has everything they need and shares information daily. She is a trusted mentor who wants her staff to grow both personally and professionally. Sandra's work ethic and commitment to her job are evidenced in the success of the programs she has managed. WVU has held the WV AHEC grant under her leadership as Associate Director and currently as Principal Investigator and Director of the Program. She is an active member of the AHEC Northeast Coast Collaborative, working with multiple state AHEC Programs to improve program outcomes by sharing challenges and successes with other members of the group.

TAMMY FEAMSTER

PROJECT COORDINATOR FOR THE APPALACHIAN REGIONAL COMMISSION INSPIRING HOPE GRANT IN SOUTHERN WV

I began my position in August, 2021. I work at God's Way Home (GWH) in Greenbrier County where I do a little bit of everything. GWH is a long-term recovery center for men that has the capacity to service eight patients. I assist residents with transportation, support services, outreach coordination and grant reporting requirements. Future plans for GWH include expansion of an additional long-term recovery home in Rainelle to be able to provide more services to those in recovery. In my spare time, I enjoy spending time with my grandson, crafting, camping and gardening.



STEPHAN BROOKS, DHSC, MPH, CHES[®]

SPECIAL PROJECTS COORDINATOR FOR THE WV AHEC PROGRAM OFFICE

I was born and raised in Monongalia County and attended WVU for my undergraduate and graduate studies after receiving the HSTA scholarship, which I attribute as a primary reason for going to college. I met my fiancé, Margaret, during our time together as students on the Health Sciences Campus in Morgantown and got married in June of 2022. I have worked in the behavioral health/health education field for more than a decade. During my time at WVU Medicine, working in the emergency department, I became friends with many people that became highly influential in my professional career. I had the opportunity to conduct research alongside highly skilled and passionate professionals seeking to understand the predispositions to opioid addiction better. I come to WV AHEC after spending several years overseeing the health education/ alcohol and other drug services program at the Clarion University of Pennsylvania and completing my doctorate studies in health science. I could not be happier returning to my home state of WV. I began my new role in January of 2022 with the hopes of improving health outcomes for members of my community, influencing students enrolled in universities across the state, and working with organizations that influenced and guided me. I am excited to work with all the AHEC Centers and their directors to highlight and expand the meaningful work being conducted throughout the state.

VICTORIA SANCHEZ, PHD

DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION, WVU INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY AND RURAL HEALTH

I joined the Institute in August 2021 after serving as the Director of WVU's Pre-Health Professional Development Office for five years. In that role, I collaborated with the Institute's college-level pipeline programs (at that time, RUSH and Rural Health Day) and got to know the wonderful people at the Institute and work they are doing. When the opportunity presented itself to join the team combining my passion for helping aspiring health professional students and love of data, I couldn't resist. It's been a delight to witness the same WVU students I worked with over the past five years as undergraduates continue their journey towards a career in rural health with the support of the Institute.

I'm not originally from West Virginia but fell in love with the natural beauty of the region and outdoor adventures it affords back in 2003 when I attended college in western Maryland. I later lived in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains (Charlottesville) as I completed my graduate work and in Philadelphia as a post-doctoral fellow developing skills as an addiction researcher. I'm excited to combine my experience as researcher with my passion for helping students and more broadly the region. I'm so fortunate to have found a place where my interests in helping students reach their potential and aspirations, treating and preventing addiction, and data management and analysis converge, and I get to do it with great colleagues.



PIPELINE RURAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

The inaugural PREP (Pipeline Rural Education Program) cohort successfully finished the program in April 2022. Ten undergraduate students with health-related/STEM majors were chosen in May 2021 and began the program in Fall 2021. PREP introduces WVU undergraduate students to pathways into the rural healthcare professions. All rising undergraduate juniors and seniors in specific majors were invited to apply. A \$500 participation award was earned at the completion of the program. There were ten spots available.

Inaugural PREP cohort:

Olivia Barbee
Kaitlin Beegle
Lily Cessna
Rylee Childers
Jarrett Childress
Dakota McCoy
Sonia-Frida Ndifon
Liz Rahall
Maggie Robertson
Mercy Udah

PREP students participated in hands-on activities by attending Project REACH events held throughout the year in the most underserved West Virginia communities. These events concentrated on learning how to interact with community leaders and assess the needs of the area and provide non-invasive care. The students provided information on healthy eating, dental care, and exercise. The students also learned how administer blood pressure checks and vital signs. The students also attended rural immersions on various topics which included substance use disorder, health disparities and inequities in rural communities, and cultural competency in rural communities.

PREP students also attended Rural Health Interest Group meetings and attended WVU Rural Health Day in the spring. A poster session was held in April where PREP students presented on a subject or concept, they felt more impactful from the curriculum.

The PREP program application will open in early fall 2022. For more information <https://www.hsc.wvu.edu/icrh/students/prep-program/> or christie.zachary@hsc.wvu.edu jessica.stidham@hsc.wvu.edu

Housing

The WVU Institute for Community and Rural Health provides housing across West Virginia

where health sciences students from varied disciplines which includes medicine, dentistry, occupational therapy, pharmacy and physical therapy, complete community-based rotations. Students utilizing housing are from both in-state and out-of-state universities. Marshall University, University of Charleston, West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine, West Virginia University, Wheeling Jesuit University, Spalding University in Kentucky, University of Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania, and Shenandoah University in Virginia.

Expanding the housing is imperative to meet the needs of clinical rotation schedules.

Southern, WV region housing has four new housing units which have all been obtained and furnished within the last seven months.

DELBARTON HOUSE (Mingo County) houses four students.



RAINELLE HOUSE (Greenbrier County) houses three students.





**LOGAN
APARTMENT
(Logan County)
houses two
students.**

**SUMMERSVILLE HOUSE
(Nicholas County) houses two
students.**



WV AHEC RURAL COMMUNITY HEALTH SCHOLARS

Emmanuel Dimitri Foko Tito, D.O.
Internal Medicine



ALUMNUS EMMANUEL DIMITRI FOKO TITO

My name is Dimitri Tito, and I was born in a suburb of Douala, Cameroon, which is where my passion for rural medicine started. I grew up in a small town that was abandoned by many because of the lack of modern infrastructures – such as local stores to accommodate residents. While many of my neighbors faced shortages of food and clean water, more broadly, the entire community lacked medical care.

I left Cameroon at the age of fifteen because my parents pictured the United States as a land of opportunities where each of their children could succeed. Before and after the move I grew up in rural community neighborhoods with limited access to medical resources; this way of living has shaped me to be more understanding to the needs of underserved populations.

I received a bachelor's degree in Biomedical Engineering from the University of Maryland, College Park in 2016 prior to enrolling in medical school. In 2020, I graduated from the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine, and currently, I am Internal Medicine resident at the Western Michigan University Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine.

What drew you to become a WV AHEC Rural Community Health Scholar (RCH Scholars)? What was your favorite part of the curriculum?

As I completed my third year clinical rotations in Petersburg, WV, I noticed that access to health care providers remained one of the largest health care challenges in rural West Virginia; and with more than half of the state population living in underserved areas, socioeconomic and cultural factors were among the most common determinants of health. As a Rural Health Initiative Scholar at WVSOM, I was encouraged to apply for the WV AHEC RCH Scholars Program to further my interest to practice in rural communities. I joined the program to equip myself with skills and interprofessional education experiences necessary to practice in rural areas.

My favorite part of the curriculum was the learning modules integrated with discussion boards as well as the immersion trips. The Veterans in Rural Healthcare was my favorite module, because as a military member, I was able to relate to this special population. It is a well-rounded course exploring the complexity of challenges faced by rural veterans and their families and the implications for healthcare providers. Further, I also appreciated the in-person immersion activities such as the Opioid Misuse in rural Communities and Substance use disorder which provided me with hands on experiential learning.

How did the Scholars Program compliment your degree program and/or career goals? What component(s) of the RCH Scholars Program were most influential to your current career path?

The WV AHEC RCH Scholars Program provided me with hands-on experiential learning through immersive opportunities within underserved communities. Participating in immersive modules and engaging with other interprofessional students were certainly the most complimentary to my career goals. Our clinical learning activities on chronic diseases allowed me to not only design a plan of action for addressing a healthcare need, but also to implement community-based programs. It was through these reflective assignments that I founded the Body Screening Project in my second year in the program (fourth year of Medical School). The Body Screening Project (BSP) is a student-run rural community program providing access to free health screening services and health maintenance education to underserved populations. Currently, BSP is an international nonprofit organization aiming to identify non-previously known disease related risks factors in residents of rural areas.

In what ways are you utilizing what you learned in the RCH Scholars Program in your current practice?

I believe I am a well-rounded physician because of WV AHEC RCH Scholars Program. I learned to recognize the social determinants of health when caring for my patients, especially the challenges faced by rural veterans and their families. In clinical encounters, I explore socioeconomic and psychological needs of every patient, and this program has prepared me to view populations I serve through a culturally appropriate lens. In my practice, I take it one step further by advocating for improved services and community development opportunities for patients from underserved backgrounds.

Tell us about your current placement/work environment: Are you currently serving a rural and/or medically underserved population? What has your experience been working in this type of community?

Currently, I am in my second year of internal medicine residency at Western Michigan University Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine where I serve a medically underserved population; it is a community that I relate to, and I am fortunate to be their primary care provider.

In this role, I continue to witness challenges with the lack of community-based programs to prevent chronic diseases, as well as a lack of understanding that rural families experience illness differently than their urban counterparts. Therefore, working in this community is a rewarding experience, as I witness improved healthcare outcomes and implement them through the holistic care of my own patients.

RURAL UNDERGRADUATE SHADOWING IN HEALTHCARE PROGRAM

The Rural Undergraduate Shadowing in Healthcare Program provides participants with a unique experience that offers insight into what it is like to practice a health profession in rural West Virginia. The RUSH program is very competitive and only awards seven spots per year. Participants must be a current WVU student in good academic standing planning to pursue a healthcare career with the possible long-term goal of practicing in a rural or underserved area of West Virginia in Family Medicine, Dentistry, Physical Therapy, and Nursing. Selected students shadow a rural preceptor for a total of 20 hours during specific dates agreed upon by the participating practitioner and the student and work with the WVU Institute for Community and Rural Health and the WVU Pre-Health Professional Development Office to identify other rural-related programs relevant to their chosen health profession discipline. This could include research and outreach activities. RUSH students also meet one or more times with the Pre-Health Professional Development Office to put together their professional school application, which includes guidance on class choice, writing a personal statement, mock interviews and obtaining a committee letter. Despite the challenges of the global pandemic, seven students participated in the RUSH program for 2021-2022 and finished their 20 hours between December 2021 and April 2022. This is a testament to the dedication of our preceptors to provide our students with a full experience.

RUSH has been in existence since 2016 and we now have enough cohorts to measure the long-term impact of the program in relation to participants staying in the state to practice. We will be evaluating matriculation one year from the completion of the program and again after 5 years.

For more information contact Christie J. Zachary, Program Manager of Student Outreach and Marketing, WVU Institute for Community and Rural Health christie.zachary@hsc.wvu.edu



Nick Hatcher – Dr. Ariel Mooney - preceptor



Grant Keller – Dr. Stephen Armitage - preceptor



Marleah Knights – Anitra Ellis, NP - preceptor



Shea Pridemore – Dr. Joanna Bailey preceptor



Luke Ochsenbein – Dr. Laura Nulph - preceptor



Alex Tucker – Dr. Joanna Bailey - preceptor



Liz Rahall – Dr. Angela Cherry - preceptor

COMMUNITY AND RURAL ROTATION SUPPORT

Another recruitment program of the Institute for Community and Rural Health, CARRS was launched in the Spring Semester of 2018 sponsoring medical and dental students on rural rotations. When a student is selected to participate in CARRS (application and review process) they agree to work with a community mentor on a project for a minimum of 20 hours while on their rural rotation. Students are given a stipend after the project and rotation are complete.

Although COVID restrictions took a toll on the program, we continued to sponsor students throughout 2020 and 2021. In fact, we have expanded the program to include pharmacy students and physician assistant students. CARRS averages 10 students per year with representation of all four disciplines currently eligible for the program.

Student comments and reflections have been overwhelmingly positive and also offered important suggestions for improvement from the student perspective.

“The best part of my community experience was getting to know and bond with more of my fellow West Virginians and to appreciate how Appalachian culture has shaped and influence healthcare in rural communities. Growing up in North Central WV, my childhood perception of what life is like in the state is considerably different than the reality of West Virginia, where there is a marked difference between life -- culture and healthcare access both -- from Weirton to Welch to Parkersburg to Pineville to Bridgeport to Beckley to Elkins to Martinsburg. These differences make rural healthcare an ever-changing challenge for physicians due to the importance of rapport building, cultural literacy, and acknowledging one’s own implicit biases and the influence of external media on the formation of our preconceived notions of these communities. However, I find this considerable culture variation to be the most beautiful thing about West Virginia. That I, a redhead Muslim son of immigrants can bond with a 94 year old matriarch from a multi-generational family of coal miners over our love of Mountaineer sports, fall colors on winding drives, and chicken and dumplings, is testament to the magic of West Virginia and the sacredness of the bond between physician and patient. Just as no two mountains, creeks, hillsides, or hollers in the state are the same, no two patients in rural Appalachia are the same; and moreover, West Virginia as a whole is all for the better because of this rich diversity.”

Ahmed Haque, WVU Medical Student

“The best part of this experience has been developing long-lasting relationships with members of the community. Unlike larger areas and chain pharmacies, community pharmacies in small, rural areas are given the opportunity to really get to know their patients and spend more one-on-one time with each patient to truly understand their issues and what we can do to best assist them. I may be a little biased as I was raised in Logan County, but I have been fortunate enough to work with and serve some of the friendliest, kindest people I have ever met.”

Michaela Trent, WVU Pharmacy Student

“The best part of my community experience was interacting with patients from a rural area. The variability in patient presentation and the responsibility to manage more than an urban family medicine provider would typically manage provided a stimulating educational environment.”

Alexander Crum, WVU Medical Student

“I greatly enjoyed my time in rural WV during my CARRS program rotation in Mingo County, WV. I spent 4 weeks providing quality medical care to the patients of Gilbert, WV and surrounding areas. In addition to this, I was also able to complete the community outreach program with HSTA. I loved having the opportunity to teach the high school students about medicine, physician assistants, and answer their questions about college/graduate school. It was really wholesome to act as a resource to these students as I wish I had had when I was in their shoes. I worked alongside Summer Kuhn to take part in the HSTA program with the students and I am thankful for her for facilitating the meetings. I learned during this project that practicing medicine in rural communities is so imperative for the community growth and wellness. I learned that these rural health medical providers truly do make a difference in the quality of life of the patients that they see in these rural clinics. I also learned that the rural health medical providers act as great role models for children in these areas by showing them how they too can have a successful and fulfilling career.”

**Courtney Amend, WVU Physician
Assistant Student**

Our Community Mentors have gotten high marks from our students and they have provided us with important feedback on their experiences with our students. There have been two programs that have provided the most projects, WV Project ECHO and Health Sciences Technology Academy. We also have projects with community mentors from the Area Health Education Centers program and, most recently, Try This WV grantee projects. The next group we intend to partner with for CARRS is the WVU County Extension Service.

We look forward to continuing to expand CARRS to more disciplines and expand our community partnerships so students will have more choices in community mentors and projects. We extend our thanks for our community mentors, our campus rotation coordinators and faculty and most of all our students for their participation and interest in practicing in WV. We look forward to seeing many of them practicing in rural WV in the near future.

For more information about CARRS contact Molly Linkous, mlinkous@hsc.wvu.edu or Jacquelynn Copenhaver, jacopenhaver@hsc.wvu.edu or visit our website at <https://www.hsc.wvu.edu/icrh/students/carrs-program/>

Service

WVU ICRH SERVICE PROGRAM

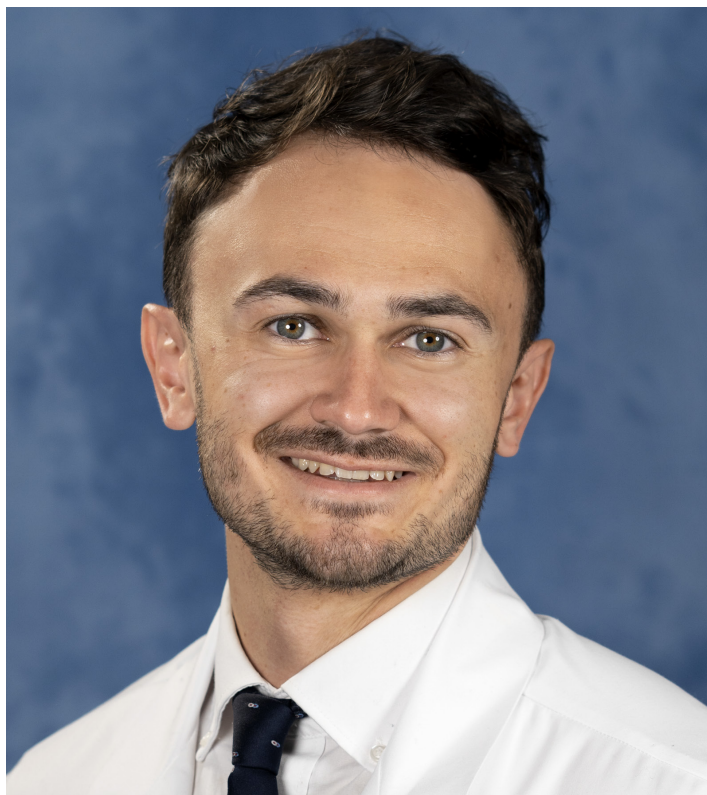
Six medical students were awarded service program funding during FY21 totaling \$125,000. Medical students Aidan Flanagan MS3, Trey Giorcelli MS2, Savannah Lusk MS3, Sarah Mitchem MS3, Amanda Rahman MS2 and Luke Stover MS3 will receive \$25,000 each and will be required to complete a 12-month service commitment in a rural/underserved area of West Virginia after residency.

“The Medical Student Service Program (MSSP) is an opportunity for me to pursue my dream of serving underserved populations. From my perspective, many physicians go on to work in hubs away from where the people who need care the most live. The MSSP will give myself and others the chance to run towards the challenge and close the gap between patient and the physician.”

Aidan Flanagan, Third-Year Medical Student (Rural Track)

“As a Raleigh County native with a strong interest in rural health, I am so thankful to be selected for the Medical Student Service Program. The program will allow me to have the opportunity to provide care in a rural area of the state without having to account for being able to pay back my student loans upon completion of residency.”

Sarah Mitchem, Third-Year Medical Student (Rural Track)



Aidan Flanagan



Sarah Mitchem



Amanda Rahman



Luke Stover



Trey Giorcelli



Savannah Lusk



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