

FALL 2024

RURAL HEALTH UPDATE

PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTION



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Preceptor Spotlight

DR. QUINTIN BRUBAKER



At Community Care of Green Bank is where you will find ICRH rock star, Dr. Quintin Brubaker practicing full time at the outpatient family practice.

Green Bank, dubbed “the quietest town in America”, is nestled in the Potomac Highlands and inside the Allegheny Mountain range of an Appalachian region in West Virginia. Located in Pocahontas county, Green Bank is home to one of the largest fully steerable telescopes in the world at the Green Bank Observatory. Having the honor of being home to the Robert C. Byrd Green Bank Telescope, comes with the cost or perk, depending who you ask, of living in a National Radio Quiet Zone town. Like all great places, belongs a community that is geographically connected to its natural beauty. In addition to the Green Bank Science Center and

Observatory, there is the Greenbrier River Trail, the Cranberry Wilderness, and plenty of opportunities to explore “natures mountain playground” in Pocahontas County. The rural town of Green Bank, WV has a population of 141 people according to the 2020 Census Bureau and the July 2023 estimated population of Pocahontas county is 7,765.

Community Care of West Virginia (CCWV) is a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) located in West Virginia with eighteen (18) community health center locations, fifty (50) school-based health sites, eight (8) 340(b) pharmacies, and one (1) dental office. Community Care of West Virginia employs a dynamic team of more than 550 health professionals including MD, DO, FNP, PA-C, Psychiatrists, Psychologists, LICSW, LCSW, LGSW, RPH, and DDS's.

Dr. Brubaker is from Winchester, VA, roughly 2 hours and 45 minutes away from Green Bank, WV. He shares that the path he took to become a medical health professional was a winding one. Prior to entering medical school, he volunteered and worked 8 years as an EMT and paramedic in Virginia. His college education began at

University of Virginia where he graduated with a BA in History and then carried on to complete Pre Med sciences at James Madison University in VA. He next attended medical school and the Family Medicine Residency at West Virginia University. During medical school he was highly involved in the WVU School of Medicine Rural Track program as well as student government as the class president.

When asked what helped guide his decision to serve in a rural community, Dr. Quintin Brubaker shared that he grew up in a fairly rural area and he's always liked the idea of living in a smaller town. While working his primary role as a paramedic in a very rural area of Virginia, he explained how they often cared for a very underserved population. He continued to share, "On the ambulance I often thought "if only these people had more access to primary care" perhaps they wouldn't need emergency care so often." Those experiences and curiosity were the seed of his interest in rural primary care. Dr. Brubaker also shared that his interest was strongly nurtured by the Rural Track Program and Department of Family Medicine while in medical school at WVU.

Dr. Brubaker's advice to current and future health profession students: "Current students, just keep up the hard work and make a point of regularly reminding yourself of the motivation or goals that got you into this field. Future students, try to achieve great clarity about your motivation and goals before jumping in."

And finally, when asked if there was anything else Dr. Quintin Brubaker would like to add to this interview... "Mountaineer basketball 2025 champs, calling it now!"

If you are WVU medical student and interested in having a clinical rotation experience with Dr. Brubaker, or are curious about how to become a rural community-based preceptor, please contact Molly Linkous at mlinkous@hsc.wvu.edu to find out more.

Be sure to check out the Star Gazing events at the Green Bank Observatory if you are in the area!

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 to become a preceptor for future healthcare providers, please contact Molly Linkous at WVU Institute for Community and Rural Health, mlinkous@hsc.wvu.edu.



West Virginia Legislature, Photo By Will Price

WV AHEC RURAL COMMUNITY HEALTH SCHOLARS PROGRAM 2024

This year, 36 of West Virginia's best and brightest health professions students were admitted into and began their first year of the WV AHEC Rural Community Health (RCH) Scholars program, 14 of whom are enrolled at WVU. Additionally, 33 Scholars, including 10 WVU students, began their second year of the two-year program. These Scholars represent 11 disciplines from 7 institutions across the state.

Scholars have the unique opportunity to develop an astute understanding of how to become leaders in their professions and communities, how best to implement healthcare services in rural and underserved areas, and work as part of an interprofessional team. They also receive training and education from experts in rural healthcare, learn to provide meaningful patient care in the field, and gain hands-on experience to refine their skill set and positively impact the lives of West Virginians. The Scholars program aims to provide interprofessional education through clinical, didactic, and community-based experiences to foster a positive change in healthcare delivery and outcomes. WV AHEC and the RCH Scholars program support WV residents' healthcare needs through workforce development, enhanced education, and increased access to care.

For more information on the RCH Scholars program, visit our website (go.wvu.edu/ahec) or contact us at RCH_Scholars@hsc.wvu.edu.

GET TO KNOW **KISSTAMAN EPPS,** PROGRAM MANAGER, WVU AHEC COMMUNITY RURAL



1. Tell me a little bit about younger, college-aged, Kisstaman.

I originally went to a small business college in Pittsburgh immediately after graduating from High School and got an associate degree. I started my career as a legal secretary and eventually started working at Enterprise rent-a-car for 11 years, climbing the corporate ladder. Eventually I got my BA and master's degree at WVU.

2. Tell me about what drew you to a career in higher education.

As an Enterprise Manager, I attended career fairs on college campus looking to hire staff and after getting married to my husband, who has a doctorate degree in education administration I wanted to working in higher education as a way to be an example to the next generation and to work a more 9 to 5 job.

3. What are you most proud of?

For me, I am most proud of my accomplishments as a parent. Why? Because family is important to me and my youngest just finished his first semester at WVU and made the president's list.

4. What has been your most interesting adventure?

I will be running my 15th full marathon this week. Why? I get to meet folks from various background, ages and cultures that all love running and the great outdoors.

5. Why did you choose to stay in West Virginia?

I absolutely love West Virginia! It is also close to my parents who are in Pittsburgh.

6. What have you accomplished recently that you never thought about even trying 10 years ago?

Probably joining sorority Alpha Kappa Alpha. I am so grateful to have this opportunity though.

7. Favorite past-time?

I love to learn new things

8. What are you most excited about concerning your role as the Program Manager for the AHEC Community Rural Scholars program?

Everything! I love community service, working with students, advising, and sharing my ideas and watching younger people blossom.



Students

HEALTH SCIENCES & TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY (HSTA)

Each year, the West Virginia Area Health Education Centers (WV AHEC) program supports Health Sciences & Technology Academy (HSTA) high school students who attend HSTA summer camps in the state. HSTA is a one-of-a-kind mentoring program that helps participating high school students enter and succeed in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine (STEM+M) undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

In 2023, HSTA summer camps were held at university and college campuses throughout the state. More than 150 freshmen students attended camps at Marshall University and WVU Potomac State College. These camps are the first HSTA experience for rising 9th grade students. For many, this is their first time away from home and often the first real lab experiences they will have. The curriculum is designed to provide exploration of a variety of STEM experiences, teach study skills needed for high school success, and help students build compassion for different experiences and perspectives through multicultural activities. Students are also introduced to HSTA community research projects.

More than 100 sophomore students attended camps at WV State University and Glenville State University. The camps

provided a subject focused experience where students learned skills to develop a community research project. Almost 90 juniors and seniors attended summer camps at West Virginia University. Rising juniors worked in small groups to conduct an in-depth study of specific subject matter. Each group explored a different topic, allowing students to become the experts on their subject which translated into community research project proposals used during the school year. Project proposals were shared with other students during a presentation at the end of the camp week. Career exploration, multicultural education, fundamentals of statistical analysis, and community based participatory research are topics that were integrated throughout the weeklong experience.

Throughout the year, the five regional WV AHEC Centers provide programming that focuses on promoting health careers to high school students. In addition to supporting HSTA camps, the Centers host health careers clubs, career fairs, health careers shadowing programs and student tours. These programs build pathways into health careers for students and encourages them to work in rural and underserved areas of the state.

New Faces

GET TO KNOW MEGAN GOVINDAN, PH.D. RESEARCH ASSOCIATE, WVU INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY AND RURAL HEALTH

1. Tell me a little bit about young, high school-aged Megan.

I was born and raised in Wheeling, West Virginia. I am a proud Bolivian, Indian woman who is a first-generation West Virginian and second-generation health care practitioner in West Virginia.

2. Tell me about what drew you to have such a passion for nutrition, particularly in relation to rural and underserved communities.

To me, food, food systems, and agriculture represent the most intimate relationship with our environment, our communities and ourselves. Rural and underserved communities need to be at the front of food system transformation and have opportunities to lead.

3. What made you want to do research?

I have always wanted to use my time, energy, and skills to help others. To me, research is bringing light to problems and working with communities to build capacity to address those problems.

4. What has been your most interesting adventure? Why?

Every year I go on an extended adventure in the Pacific Northwest wilderness with best friends from West Virginia. From hiking in the remote mountains to exploring wild & scenic rivers it is an opportunity to deepen our relationship, build trust and community.

5. Why did you choose to stay in West Virginia?

I am of Appalachia. This is my home and where my community is. I have dedicated my life to do my part in making it better for the next generation.

6. What have you accomplished recently that you never thought about even trying 10 years ago?

I never would have dreamed about the ability to lead a regional USDA program.

7. Favorite food/meal?

Chimichurri



8. Favorite book/movie/TV show?

My Bolivian Kitchen

9. Why the WVU Institute for Community and Rural Health?

I choose to work in service to the WVU Institute for Community and Rural Health because of their mission, dedicated staff, excellent programs, and commitment to cultivating a brighter and sustainable future.

10. What do you want to be when you grow up?

A lavender farmer.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE'S INCREASING LAND ACCESS PROGRAM

West Virginia University is leading one of 50 projects as part of a nationwide effort to increase farmland availability to underserved populations, while also helping producers obtain working capital and means of food distribution.

The WVU Institute for Community and Rural Health was awarded a five-year, \$8.5 million cooperative agreement grant for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Increasing Land Access Program, funded by President Joe Biden's Inflation Reduction Act.

Titled "Working Lands of Central Appalachia," the WVU project covers West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Virginia and North Carolina. Pairing with 11 state, regional and national organizations, the group will address agricultural workforce training, farm-to-institution markets and food as medicine. Their work will focus on assisting underserved veterans, people with limited resources, and beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers.

"By engaging state institutions to assess demands for local food procurement and community benefit programs, this project supports healthier food systems in the community to address social determinants of health," said Megan Govindan, ICRH research associate, who leads the regional effort.

Opening farmlands and job opportunities

"The goal of increasing land access is to be able to support our agricultural future by utilizing existing markets and finding sources of capital, whether that be policy focused or otherwise," Govindan explained.

To increase the availability of farmlands, Govindan and her team will conduct audits of public and private holdings.

Existing public farmlands include those owned by the West Virginia Department of Agriculture and institutions such as WVU and community hospitals. Input from landowners will help determine how to increase access and production at these sites.

Private farmlands include heirs' property, acreage which was passed down without a will or clear deed. The descendants may have the right to use the land and may have difficulties in obtaining federal benefits. As private lands become available to those interested in farming or increasing efficiencies, Govindan expects to see matchmaking opportunities for agricultural careers and training.

"West Virginia leads the nation in small, family-owned farms," she said. "Supporting agricultural communities is critical to increasing food access."

Creating farm-to-institution pathways

Project partners plan to build on the support of government policies that require certain institutions to include fresh food in their meal plans and another that mandates nonprofit hospitals complete

community health needs assessments. Using that data, they will create an anchor collaborative to manage local food procurement and community benefit provisions.

"As we're engaging those hospitals through community benefit, it opens the opportunity for all nonprofits to be able to engage and accelerate their institutional investment," Govindan said. "We'll have a standardized language of what those activities are so they can be invested in a uniform way and then replicated and scaled across the region."

Other organization partners will offer training to farmers on how to begin selling or increase product offerings to institutions and in community markets.

Providing food as medicine for healthier communities

To make fresh food more accessible in communities, the group will oversee a needs assessment and develop a curriculum that will integrate agriculture and health.

"With this curriculum we're not only talking about the opportunities within agriculture, but how to be able to make our communities more food secure," Govindan said.

The project leverages ICRH resources, including WVU student organizations Project REACH — Rural Education Alliance for Community Health — and Rural Health Interest Group to support the cultivation of healthier rural communities.

Govindan explained students filling various roles in the project will gain cultural competency and an understanding of barriers rural communities face.

"Many patients live in food deserts and may be food insecure," she said. "This project provides health science students with food as medicine experiences that will improve their ability to practice in rural areas, while addressing social determinants of health and engaging national, regional and state partners."

Govindan added the project also supports recruitment and retention of health care practitioners by addressing other systems that impact population health.

The project incorporates its network of resources to accomplish the goals of each of the focus areas. Some examples of how their work will intertwine include the Virginia State University Small Farm Extension Service assessing needs in southwestern Virginia, southern West Virginia and the West Virginia coalfields, and the Pennsylvania Center for Dairy Excellence training West Virginia dairy farmers on ways to increase their production.

"As we're building those pathways, we'll also be engaging a number of West Virginia organizations that will help coordinate training activities to get the support we need for land, capital and market access," Govindan said.

NEW DIRECTOR



The West Virginia University Institute for Community and Rural Health has welcomed Brianna Sheppard, Ph.D., as director of the West Virginia Area Health Education Centers Program, effective April 15.

In this role, Sheppard will lead the West Virginia AHEC Program Office in Charleston, overseeing project planning and implementation in the state for five regional Centers and building partnerships with federal and state government agencies that help improve health for rural and underserved populations.

"It is a distinct pleasure to welcome Brianna Sheppard back home to West Virginia and the WVU Institute for Community and Rural Health," Larry Rhodes, M.D., executive director rural programs, said. "Bri not only brings significant expertise in research, training, mentorship and leadership in rural health, but more importantly a true passion for those living in rural and underserved areas of Appalachia. The entire state will benefit greatly from her decision to return to the West Virginia hills."

Sheppard returns to WVU after serving as associate director of rural health workforce and center development at the National Center for Rural Health Professions at the University of Illinois College of Medicine Rockford. Prior to joining the National Center for Rural Health Professions, she held various positions at WVU including research and leadership roles with the WVU Health Affairs Institute, West Virginia Clinical & Translational Science Institute and Institute for Community and Rural Health. She also served as faculty for the School of Public Health and Office of Research & Graduate Education.

"I am excited to be back at WVU and serving the state of West Virginia through the important work of the WV AHEC Program, which provides opportunities for students to explore healthcare careers and train to become the next generation of high-quality healthcare providers that our state deserves," Sheppard said. "The Program also provides opportunities to support our dedicated healthcare professionals and partners across the state who work hard to make West Virginia a place that people want to live and work. I am grateful to be entrusted with leading the WV AHEC Program as a driver of workforce development and positive change for the state."

Sheppard is a member of various professional organizations, including the National Rural Health Association, National Area Health Center Organization and Appalachian Translational Research Network, among others. She has authored several peer-reviewed journal articles, and she frequently presents her work on health education, health assessment and rural health. In addition to scholarly work, Sheppard has served as a mentor for numerous undergraduate and graduate students.

Sheppard holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Virginia's College at Wise and a master's degree and doctoral degree in psychology from East Tennessee State University. She completed postdoctoral education at the University of Pittsburgh Center for Pain Research.

The Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) Program was developed by Congress in 1971 to recruit, train and retain a health professions workforce committed to underserved populations. The West Virginia AHEC Program's mission is to improve the health by developing an interprofessional workforce prepared to address the health needs of rural and underserved communities across the state. Program priorities include introducing health profession careers and offering opportunities for academic enhancement to students in grades 9-12; providing health professions students and residents in higher education with clinical experiences in community-based settings; promoting the optimal use of the healthcare workforce and improving quality of care delivered through interprofessional collaboration; and strengthening the existing healthcare workforce in rural and underserved areas and supporting the retention of community-based health professionals.

PREP (PIPELINE RURAL EDUCATION PROGRAM)

The third PREP (Pipeline Rural Education Program) cohort successfully finished the program in May 2024. Nine undergraduate students with health-related/STEM majors were chosen and began the program requirements in Fall 2023. PREP introduces WVU undergraduate students to pathways into 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.

PREP Participants (shown below):

- Bethany Knight
- Abigail Tillema
- Hannah Grace- Birmingham
- Luke Ochsenbein
- Faith Burrill
- Courtney Cobb
- Brian Dawson
- Genavieve Vanaman
- Not pictured - Grace 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 to assess the needs of the area and provide non-invasive care. The students provided information on nutrition, dental care, exercise, substance use disorder, and women’s health. The students also learned how to administer blood pressure checks, vital signs, and how to calculate BMI. The students also attended rural immersions throughout the state with a focus on various topics which included substance use disorder, health disparities and inequities in rural communities, and cultural competency in rural communities. The Rural Immersion is the most popular PREP requirement.

PREP students also attended Rural Health Interest Group meetings and attended WVU Rural Health Day in the spring. A poster session and graduation with the presenting of cords was held on May 4, 2024 at the Erickson Alumni Center. PREP students presented on a subject or concept from the curriculum, that they felt was most impactful. The poster session was a creative way for the students to showcase and explore their deepest interests in rural community healthcare.

The PREP program application will open in early fall 2024. For more information <https://www.hsc.wvu.edu/icrh/students/prep-program/> or christie.zachary@hsc.wvu.edu



Outreach

RURAL HEALTH DAY

APRIL 6, 2024

The ninth annual WVU Rural Health Day was Saturday, April 6, 2024 at the West Virginia University Health Sciences Center in Morgantown, WV. Nearly 60 pre-health undergraduate students from community colleges and four-year institutions from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio and West Virginia descended on campus to participate. WVU Rural Health Day introduces future healthcare professionals to a hands-on rural health experience. The goal is to offer a unique experience that piques the interest students may have in choosing a rural track curriculum and then a career in rural health practicing in underserved areas in the state.

The morning sessions allowed students to hear personal stories and interact with current practicing clinicians who chose the rural pathway to practice and the challenges and greater benefits to living and practicing in a rural community. The students also had a chance to get perspective on how to navigate the journey to medical school, dental school, nursing and other healthcare professions programs. The student panel discussion featured current rural track medical school students from first-year to fourth-year and first-year dental students.

The panelists delivered first-hand experiences of the rural track curriculum which includes, rural immersions, practicing with a rural preceptor, the pressures of choosing a path, advice on studying, and next steps for applying. Practicing clinicians offered advice on balancing a heavy schedule and rural lifestyle and the benefits of raising a family in the charm of a small town. The panel discussions have proven to be invaluable. They give curious students a chance to really ask the most intricate, detailed questions and have actual one-on-one dialogue. The afternoon sessions rotated students through hands-on practices such as suturing, ultrasound, behavioral medicine, dental procedures and nursing practices. These sessions open the door to the basics of healthcare taught by family medicine physicians, behavioral medicine physicians, and nursing and dental students. The interactions give the students an advantage if they should choose to pursue graduate programs in health professions. WVU Rural Health Day would not be possible without the many volunteers consisting of staff, clinicians, and students. We sincerely thank everyone for their time and expertise. The 2025 WVU Rural Health Day registration will open in January 2025.

For more information hsc.wvu.edu/icrh/students/wvu-rural-health-day/ or christie.zachary@hsc.wvu.edu





CONNECTING WVU HEALTH PROFESSION STUDENTS WITH RURAL COMMUNITY MENTORS

The Community And Rural Rotation Support program (CARRS) is a program of the WVU Institute for Community and Rural Health (ICRH) and has support from the Schools of Dentistry, Medicine and Pharmacy, as well as the Physician Assistant Studies program. The CARRS program has three goals:

1. Provide financial support for health profession students interested in rural practice
2. Offer the opportunity for health profession students to contribute to impacting health outcomes through community-based projects
3. Create a platform for rural community recruitment efforts

In order to address these goals, the CARRS program engages the following:

- Requires student participants to complete a community project with the guidance of a community mentor, which CARRS has already identified
- Offers a stipend to students who are participating in rural rotations in specific counties, and have an interest in entering rural practice after graduation (\$1500 for a 4-week rotation)
- Rotations must be scheduled or requested in one of the high risk/high need counties identified as CARRS counties
- Gives participants the opportunity to complete a written reflection of their community experience and a brief evaluation after the rotation is complete

CARRS-designated counties are defined by the program as high risk/high need by considering a broad variety of risk factors including: federal primary care, dental and behavioral health Health Profession Shortage Area (HPSA) scores and rural designations, poverty rate, teen pregnancy rate, high school graduation rate, vulnerability to overdose deaths county rankings, High Intensity

Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) county designations and WV Kids Count county rankings. Data sources include the Health Resources and Services Administration, US Census Bureau, WV Kids Count (Annie E. Casey Foundation), County Health Rankings (United Health Foundation) and Office of National Drug Control Policy. The CARRS counties were selected based on a weighted assessment of these risk factors and include: Boone, Calhoun, Clay, Doddridge, Fayette, Hampshire, Lincoln, Logan, Mason, McDowell/Wyoming, Mingo, Ritchie, Roane, Wirt. Our community projects for students in these counties have focused primarily on WV Project ECHO® and Health Sciences Technology Academy (HSTA). We also work with WV Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) and Try This WV.

Our community partners and their projects are a major enticement for students who apply for CARRS. The stipend (\$1500 for a 4-week rotation) makes it attractive, but if the projects are not interesting or intriguing, students would not apply, even for the stipend. Students across disciplines tell ICRH staff that given the volume of studying, tests, clinical rotations and other requirements, they have to be very choosy about what additional obligations they make. Our CARRS community projects are of great importance in drawing students to apply for CARRS. We are fortunate to have several active and outstanding community partners who help to make CARRS a positive experience for our students and for the communities. The table below shows the CARRS counties along with the counties in which our key partners have projects available for our CARRS students.

The Health Sciences & Technology Academy

The Health Sciences & Technology Academy, known as HSTA, is a unique mentoring program in the state of West Virginia that helps underserved students, grades 9-12, enter and succeed in STEM+M-based undergraduate and graduate degree programs. HSTA is structured around the efforts of hundreds of mentors, teachers, community members and higher-education faculty and staff, supporting these students who are facing social and financial

challenges to obtaining a diploma and furthering their education. The HSTA program currently has a network of 80 teachers who serve hundreds of students across the state.

Implemented through West Virginia University, HSTA's main goals are to increase college attendance in Appalachia, improve STEM+M education in public schools, empower communities through youth leadership, and increase the number of healthcare providers and STEM+M educators in underserved communities. The program puts rigorous academic expectations into place that connect learning to students' personal experiences. It offers, through the support of the West Virginia Legislature and state colleges and universities, substantial tuition waivers to successful participants who go on to attend an in-state institutions for an undergraduate or STEM+M-based graduate degree.

CARRS participants are able to work with HSTA mentors to contribute to the program and help the HSTA students meet the goals, requirements and expectations of the program. CARRS students often present information about their own journey to health profession school, from high school grades to applications/ interviews for health profession school to where they are planning to practice or attend residency after they graduate. CARRS students also participate in HSTA community health fairs, mentor HSTA students with regard to their research projects and other activities identified by the HSTA mentor. If you would like to learn more about HSTA, visit <https://health.wvu.edu/health-sciences-and-technology-academy/>

WV Project ECHO®

The ECHO® model known as Extensions for Community Healthcare Outcomes, is an innovative approach that enhances the workforce's capacity to deliver optimal specialty care and mitigate health disparities. At the core of the ECHO® model™ are its hub-and-spoke knowledge-sharing networks, orchestrated by expert teams. These teams employ multi-point video conferencing to conduct virtual clinics, fostering collaboration with community providers. Consequently, primary care professionals, including doctors, nurses, and clinicians, acquire the skills to deliver high-quality specialty care within their local communities. Since its inception in 2016, the WV Clinical and Translational Science Institute (WVCTSI) Project ECHO® program has flourished, encompassing ten distinct clinical areas, including Hepatitis C/ HIV, Substance Use Disorder (SUD), Chronic Lung Disease, and Psychiatry. A strength of the ECHO® program is establishing collaborative learning between academic medical experts and community clinicians to ensure evidence-based practices are effectively implemented statewide.

Partnering with the CARRS program students are paired with

a mentor, identify a patient, prepare the case presentation and present a case during an ECHO session. Whenever possible they participate in one or more sessions prior to their case presentation and after they present their case, they have the opportunity to see how the ECHO model creates connections between rural providers and specialists who are not located in rural areas. For more information about Project ECHO® visit <https://www.wvctsi.org/programs/community-engagement-outreach/project-echo/>

WV Area Health Education Centers

The Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) program was developed by Congress in 1971 to recruit, train, and retain a health professions workforce committed to underserved populations. The West Virginia AHEC program helps to bridge the gap between academic medicine and local community health needs by addressing rural health disparities and encouraging cooperation between rural communities and health care professionals. There are five AHEC regional centers in WV, covering 50 of our 55 counties. WV AHEC regional centers focus on a wide variety of health programs but also have several themes that carry throughout the state, including pipeline activities for students in grades 9-12, continuing education for rural preceptors and providers and interprofessional experiences such as interactive rural immersions. WV AHEC is also the home of the Rural Community Health Scholars program, which is a statewide, interprofessional program for students interested in engaging in more experiences in rural and/or underserved settings. This two-year program is designed to help students develop their knowledge through clinical, didactic and community-based activities, all conducted in rural and/or underserved settings. For more information about WV AHEC please visit hsc.wvu.edu/west-virginia-area-health-education-center/

Projects for CARRS student involvement vary widely across the five AHEC regional centers. CARRS student might work with high school students interested in health professions or help coordinate, implement and/or participate in a community health fair or a health professions career day. In 2024, we had a CARRS student on rotation in the Northern AHEC region. For their project, the student chose to work with the Northern AHEC Executive Director, Amanda Fisher, MPH, CHES. Amanda mentors the high school students who are selected to participate in the Moving Onward and Upward program (MOU). Our physician assistant student, Kevin, chose MOU as his CARRS project and so the journey began. Kevin shared with us some of his experiences and insights during his month with MOU. Below are some excerpts from Kevin's Reflection Survey response after his rotation and CARRS project were complete.

CARRS

We ask the students, “Provide a written reflection about your community project, mentor and overall experience (200 to 500 words). Consider these questions as you reflect: How was this experience meaningful to me? What did I learn from my mentor and/or my community project? Did I learn anything new about rural and underserved communities and/or the life of a practicing health professional in these communities? You may also include details about the project including number of activities, number of participants and other unique aspects of the project from your perspective.”

Kevin's response:

“Moving Onward and Upward (MOU) is an afterschool program that helps high school students prepare for college and a career in the health field. I am a Physician Assistant student that participated in this program during my rural rotation at Minnie Hamilton Hospital in Grantsville, WV. Amanda Fisher was my mentor, and I completed my project with four MOU students (Juniors and Seniors) from Calhoun County Middle/High School. In addition to attending afterschool meetings and answering questions about college, I gave a presentation on what a physician assistant is and the journey I took navigating high school, college, and now graduate school. I shared tips for success and emphasized the great need for healthcare workers in their own underserved communities. I later gave a similar presentation via Zoom that became available to all MOU students in North Central West Virginia. During my rotation, a school bus accident, in which one of our MOU participants was on board, shook the community and reminded us of the fragility and gift of life. I was inspired by the selfless and quick actions taken by this student, and how the other students and community members rallied together during this difficult time. We were reminded of the importance of first responders and healthcare workers in Calhoun County, and I learned just how resilient rural West Virginia communities can be. Amanda Fisher did an excellent job helping the MOU participants work through challenges and gave them opportunities to grow and have fun. I'm grateful for the opportunity to have worked with my mentor and an amazing group of students at Calhoun County Middle/High School.”

CARRS Program Designated Counties with Project Counties				
	CARRS	HSTA	ECHO	AHEC
BARBOUR		√	√	√
BERKLEY		√	√	√
BOONE	√	√	√	√
BRAXTON		√	√	√
BROOKE			√	√
CABELL		√	√	
CALHOUN	√	√	√	√
CLAY	√		√	√
DOODRIDGE	√		√	√
FAYETTE	√	√	√	√
GILMER			√	√
GRANT			√	√
GREENBRIER		√	√	√
HAMPSHIRE	√		√	√
HANCOCK			√	√
HARDY			√	√
HARRISON		√	√	√
JACKSON			√	√
JEFFERSON		√	√	√
KANAWHA		√	√	√
LEWIS			√	√
LINCOLN	√	√	√	
LOGAN	√	√	√	√
MARION		√	√	√
MARSHALL		√	√	√
MASON	√		√	
MCDOWELL	√	√	√	√
MERCER		√	√	√
MINERAL			√	√
MINGO	√	√	√	√
MONOGALIA		√	√	√
MONROE			√	√
MORGAN		√	√	√
NICHOLAS			√	√
OHIO		√	√	√
PENDLETON			√	√
PLEASANTS			√	√
POCAHONTAS			√	√
PRESTON		√	√	√
PUTNAM			√	
RALEIGH		√	√	√
RANDOLPH			√	√
RITCHIE	√		√	√
ROANE	√	√	√	√
SUMMERS			√	√
TAYLOR		√	√	√
TUCKER		√	√	√
TYLER			√	√
UPSHUR			√	√
WAYNE			√	
WEBSTER		√	√	√
WETZEL			√	√
WIRT	√		√	√
WOOD			√	√
WYOMING	√		√	√

The Institute for Community and Rural Health is pleased to offer CARRS to our health sciences students and honored and grateful to work with our community mentors. We continue to look for opportunities to expand and improve the CARRS program. Two goals the co-coordinators, Jacquelynn Copenhaver and Molly Linkous, currently have for the program are to:

1. Work more closely with school schedulers for each eligible discipline to promote the program to students at key times for scheduling clinical rotations; and
2. Continue to expand the program to additional disciplines such as Physical Therapy

Thank you to everyone who has supported this program. We look forward to continuing our work together. Questions about and ideas for CARRS can be directed to the co-coordinators, Jacquelynn Copenhaver at jacopenhaver@hsc.wvu.edu and Molly Linkous at minkous@hsc.wvu.edu.

CARRS Program Designated Counties with Project Counties				
	CARRS	HSTA	ECHO	AHEC
BOONE	√	√	√	√
CALHOUN	√	√	√	√
CLAY	√		√	√
DOODRIDGE	√		√	√
FAYETTE	√	√	√	√
HAMPSHIRE	√		√	√
LINCOLN	√	√	√	
LOGAN	√	√	√	√
MASON	√		√	
MCDOWELL	√	√	√	√
MINGO	√	√	√	√
RITCHIE	√		√	√
ROANE	√	√	√	√
WIRT	√		√	√
WYOMING	√		√	√

WVU ICRH SERVICE PROGRAM

Four medical students and two 4th year dental students were awarded service program funding during FY23 totaling \$200,000. Medical students Biff Alexander MS2, Victoria Bonafield MS3, Joshua Peterson, MS2, and Cameron Rose MS2 will receive \$25,000 each and be required to complete a 12-month service commitment in a rural/underserved area of West Virginia after residency. Dental students will receive \$50,000 for a two-year commitment in a rural and/or underserved area of West Virginia. Hunter Wright will be practicing at Oceana Dental Center in Wyoming County and Dustin Yoakum will practice at Rainelle Medical Center in Greenbrier County.

Students

RURAL UNDERGRADUATE SHADOWING IN HEALTHCARE PROGRAM

The Rural Undergraduate Shadowing in Healthcare program had an unsurpassed number of applications for the 2023-2024 cohort. Six excellent students were chosen to participate and completed their shadowing from December 2023 to March 2024. The competitive RUSH program provides participants with a unique experience to shadow rural healthcare professionals in Family Medicine, Dentistry, Physical Therapy, and Nursing for 20 hours in the clinic or hospital within the rural community. The shadowing allows students to understand cultural competency when administering care as well as the day-to-day tasks related to being a professional healthcare provider. Participants must be in good academic standing and have an interest in pursuing a professional career of practice in a rural or underserved community. RUSH students are also required to meet with the WVU Pre-Health Professional Development Office to identify other rural-related programs that may be relevant to their chosen discipline, schedule mock interviews, or put together their professional application for graduate school.

The RUSH program application will open in early fall 2024. For more information hsc.wvu.edu/icrh/students/rush-program/ or christie.zachary@hsc.wvu.edu



Courtney Cobb

Dr. Stephen Armitage, Country Roads Physical Therapy, Preceptor



Madison Sigler

Dr. Laura Nulph, Pendleton Community Care, Preceptor



Brooke Elmore
Ariel Mooney, DDS, Minne Hamilton Health System, Preceptor



Bethany Knight
Anitra Ellis, DNP, Coalfield Health Center, Preceptor



Emily Stahl
Dr. Joanna Bailey, Tug River Health Association, Preceptor



Abigail Tillema
Dr. Joanna Bailey, Tug River Health Association, Preceptor

Outreach

RURAL COMMUNITY OPIOID RESPONSE PROGRAM: IMPLEMENTATION IV FUNDING

The WVUICRH was awarded and currently facilitates the Rural Community Opioid Response Program (RCORP) Implementation Funding through HRSA, initially awarded in 2019 with continued funding in 2022. The RCORP consortium includes nine agencies serving 10 counties in the Mid-Ohio Valley (MOV). The MOV RCORP consortium has had the opportunity to build cohesive partnerships across agencies that offer programs and services for SUD/ODU prevention, treatment, and recovery, expanding innovative initiatives to rural communities. One such initiative is the Calhoun Community Drop-In Resource Center in Grantsville, WV, identified as a need through 2021 recovery listening sessions.

This center is pivotal in providing support and resources for addiction recovery, offering peer support, referrals, educational programs, family activities, and crisis intervention. They reduce stigma, foster community connections, and address healthcare access challenges in rural areas. Tina Persinger and her team are instrumental in the center's success.

This is a success story of one of the center's Peer Support Specialist (PRSS), Jessica.

"My story started long ago hopeless and addicted to drugs. 6 years ago I lost custody of my children, which in return started my journey in recovery. I have been sober since March 8, 2018. Since becoming a PRSS through the Calhoun Community Resource Center I have obtained my High School Diploma, trained and became certified in many SUD / mental health areas. I also facilitate weekly SMART Recovery meetings for the drop-in center. I love watching the spark come back into my clients eyes with the success of their own journey to and through recovery.

We do recover!"

Without the dedication of the WVUICRH to securing grants that serve our rural areas, lives and community are healing as a result. The commitment of the WVUICRH to securing grants that benefit our rural areas has led to healing and improvement in lives and communities.

Calhoun County Community Resource Center >



TOMORROW IS MINE CAMP

The Tomorrow is Mine Summer camp is a camp for children from counties in southern West Virginia. The 2024 camp was the sixth which was held June 23 – 29. Through the vision and passion of Larry Rhodes, MD, Executive Director for Rural Health at WVU, the primary goal of the camp is to provide a week of inspiration through speakers and counselors from many backgrounds including art, education, public service, medicine and law. Just as importantly, a lot of fun traditional camp activities and field trips were held during the week. The camp was held on the WVU Tech Campus in Beckley where children and counselors stayed in dorms and were able to experience a college campus. The camp is offered free of charge to children ages 10 -12 who might not otherwise have a chance to attend a summer camp. The goal is to maintain a balance of fun and education while receiving messages of hope and inspiration. Local “winners” from all walks of life take part as counselors and speakers to share their stories and their skills during the daytime activities. Some traditional camp activities are things that many campers will experience for the first time. In 2023, the camp hosted 34 children from Summers, Raleigh, McDowell, and Wyoming counties. The camp aims to open the eyes and hearts of children to numerous future possibilities by exposing them to a college campus and a variety of people, many from their own communities, who have made their dreams come true. Camp costs are funded through donations.





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