

## Grant expands rural medical training opportunities

A three-year, \$542,958 Pre-Doctoral Training in Primary Care grant from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration will aid **OSU Center for Rural Health** efforts to increase the number of physicians choosing to practice in rural Oklahoma.

“We want to create programs that will provide rural health care providers as rapidly as possible by creating new residency training sites, and increase the pipeline for future rural physicians through educational programs that begin as early as middle school,” says **William Pettit, D.O.**, OSU associate dean for rural health. “This is just one grant initiative to support our mission to serve rural and under-served Oklahoma, while promoting both primary care medicine and allied health care careers in Oklahoma.”

**Jeff Hackler**, the center’s director of grants and resource development, says expanding and enhancing rural medical training will make it easier for students from rural areas to remain in rural Oklahoma for much of their training. Instead of displacing students for seven years of medical training in mostly urban settings, the Center will help these students train more often in the rural areas where they plan to return to practice.

The grant provides earlier and expanded introduction and reinforcement of primary care and rural practice, with enhanced rural clerkship experiences for all primary care departments. These activities are combined with enhanced student tracking, course evaluation, and rural, primary care research activities. The center is developing courses to introduce rural medicine and rural health for students in their first two years of medical school. **Rising second-year students** can shadow a rural physician in a three-week summer rural medical clerkship, introducing them to rural medicine early in their medical training.

**Third- and fourth-year students** will continue to take clerkships in rural health as part of community clinic, rural clinic, community hospital and emergency medicine rotations. In addition, the center will help coordinate rural rotations for other primary care electives as requested.

Learning communities will be developed in rural Oklahoma so an interested medical student can remain in a particular region of the state for much of his or her clerkships. The training regions will revolve around existing rural residency programs or developing sites in Durant, Enid, Lawton, and Tahlequah. “The Center will develop ‘community campuses’ that will support students during their training, and help them develop relationships with regional health professionals that will continue into their careers as practicing rural physicians,” Hackler says.