



February 2013

To: Missouri Legislators

From: Missouri Area Health Education Centers

Like many states, Missouri is facing a shortage of rural health care providers. Nationally, fewer than 11% of physicians choose to practice rural medicine.¹ In Missouri, only 18% of primary care physicians practice in rural areas while 37% of the population resides in these communities.² With the passing of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, the demand for health care providers will increase and access to care for rural populations will be further strained, unless there is a subsequent increase in the number of practicing rural physicians.³ Similar to national trends, the problem is further complicated in Missouri by an aging rural physician workforce, and a rural population that is older and poorer when compared to metropolitan areas.³

Policies and programs targeted to increase the number of rural physicians can address this shortage.^{4,5,6} According to one estimate, if 125 U.S. allopathic medical schools trained 10 students per class in a rural program in the next decade, the number of rural physicians produced would more than double.⁶ Medical schools used targeted interventions to influence and prepare physicians for rural practice; these include increasing the number of rural-committed students admitted from a rural background and offering rural clinical rotations during medical school. However, these interventions alone may not be enough to influence students' career decisions.^{7,8} Students need not only understand the rural community, but also develop an emotional attachment to rural living through connections with local people and culture. These experiences help students determine whether or not practicing in a similar area would provide professional and personal satisfaction.⁹

Students from the University of Missouri Columbia and AT Still University/Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine have opportunities to complete community based rural rotations as part of their clinical training. Students at Saint Louis University have opportunities for rotations in urban, underserved community-based practice locations. All seven centers work with the three program offices to make these rotations possible in their regions.



Photo: Andrea Schuster, Pilot Grove, MO, third year student from MU, on a rural rotation.

MAHEC is a partnership of seven locally-governed organizations and three university-based health professions education programs working statewide to increase the numbers of Missouri youth entering stable, high-paying jobs as healthcare professionals and the numbers of professionals caring for underserved populations.

The MAHEC partners include:

A.T. Still University –
Kirksville
University of Missouri –
Columbia
Saint Louis University
Northeast Missouri
AHEC – Kirksville
Northwest Missouri
AHEC – St. Joseph
West Central Missouri
AHEC – Lexington
Mid-Missouri AHEC –
Rolla
East Central Missouri
AHEC – St. Louis
Southeastern Missouri
AHEC – Poplar Bluff
Southwest Missouri
AHEC – Springfield



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