



Residency Programs Innovate for Wyoming

BY ROBERT MONGER, MD



The University of Wyoming Family Medicine Residency has developed three ambitious programs that expand patient care services for the people of Wyoming and enrich medical education for students and residents.

Work on the first program started several years ago when the University of Wyoming Family Medicine Residency Program in Casper was awarded a grant from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to expand patient access to addiction services, which they used to start a medication-assisted treatment (MAT) clinic. The clinic's multidisciplinary team includes an addiction counselor, nurse practitioner, pharmacist and social worker. Clinic psychiatrist Frank Del Real, MD, specializes in addiction medicine. In addition to treating patients with opioid use disorder, they also treat patients with alcohol dependence. The clinic has been very successful in meeting the needs of a traditionally underserved population of patients. They've recently added telemedicine services and they are expanding to open MAT clinics in Cheyenne and Laramie.

In addition to treating patients, the program has expanded educational opportunities for students and family medicine residents including training in motivational interviewing and SBIRT (screening, brief intervention and referral to treatment). Residents take training courses to be eligible for an X-waiver to prescribe buprenorphine; almost all of the residents who graduate from both the Casper and Cheyenne programs this year will have taken the X-waiver training courses, and many of these residents will go on to provide addiction services once they are in practice.

A second program that the residencies have started is the Rural Training Track (RTT) in Thermopolis, which aims to both meet the healthcare needs of Wyoming and to increase the number of graduates who stay in the state after completing residency. This program is also supported by a HRSA grant and achieved RTT accreditation by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) in 2018. The Casper program expanded the size of their program from eight to nine residents per year in order to add a specific RTT-designated resident, and residents in the RTT program spend their first year of residency in Casper and then their other two years in Thermopolis under the guidance of Travis Bomengen, MD.

RTT programs generally attract high-quality medical students who have a real interest in rural primary care. The first Casper RTT resident started in the program in 2020 and will

be transitioning from Casper to Thermopolis this summer. The second RTT student will start in Casper this year. The program will very likely prove to be a pipeline to bring primary care physicians to Thermopolis and the extended Bighorn Basin, and there is now the potential to expand the RTT to other locations in Wyoming through both the Casper and Cheyenne residency programs.

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A third program that the residencies have started is the Geriatric Fellowship Program that is offered through the Casper residency program. Initial work on the fellowship started five years ago and is supported through a grant from the Ellbogen Foundation. The program received Geriatric Fellowship ACGME accreditation in 2016. The fellowship uses a 0.5 FTE/24-month format to allow fellows to continue working on a part-time basis during their training. The first fellow, Tabitha Thrasher, DO, started in 2018 and graduated in 2020. She has stayed on to become the fellowship director. Read more about Dr. Thrasher on page 34. The second physician to enter the fellowship program will be starting this summer.

The Geriatric Fellowship Program works with a number of partners, including the Geriatric Center at the University of Wyoming, with a team-based approach and an emphasis on helping the elderly to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. The geriatric fellowship has the added benefit of supporting a geriatric education track for family medicine residents to provide the training and expertise needed to take care of our state's aging population.

The medication-assisted treatment clinics, Rural Training Track and Geriatric Fellowship Program are all ambitious programs that enrich both patient care services for the people of Wyoming and educational opportunities for students and residents. The leaders of the residency programs are focused on meeting the healthcare needs of Wyoming and have done an outstanding job of developing these new programs. We in Wyoming are fortunate indeed to have such great primary care programs in our state.

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