The University of Florida's Commitment to Recruit Family Physicians

Shenary Cotter, Kendall Campbell, and R. Curry Jr.
At the University of Florida, we enthusiastically educate and encourage students about family medicine. Communities in which family physicians practice are healthier, and relationships patients have with their family physicians are some of the most rewarding. We demonstrate this to UF students in a variety of settings and interactions with our faculty throughout their entire four-year medical education. Paramount to our efforts are personal interactions with core faculty members enthusiastic about family medicine and teaching. Students participate in a wide range of clinical settings, providing the full complement of family medicine. They encounter faculty members whose focus is hospital medicine, procedures, sports medicine, women’s health, student health, ambulatory care, urgent care, academic medicine and underserved care. The diversity of our faculty provides students insight into the many opportunities available in family medicine. Targeted student activities throughout medical school help spark and maintain student interest in family medicine.

The first two years of medical school are predominantly classroom learning. However, midway into the first year, they spend three weeks with a primary care physician in a clinical practice setting. Students are placed in Gainesville as well as in more distant sites. This early exposure to generalists provides an opportunity for students to see firsthand what primary care is all about: the impact on patients’ health care through the development of a relationship between the physician and the patient. This year, 63 percent of students reported that the course had a positive impact on their interest in a primary care career, while only 12 percent reported a negative impact. Even if students choose to enter a non-primary-care field, we believe this lesson on patient-physician relationships has valuable impact on their future careers.

The classroom setting is another site of exposure to family medicine faculty. Essentials of Patient Care is a required course for first- and second-year students in which they learn about the doctor/patient relationship, physical diagnosis and clinical medicine. Family medicine faculty members lead a number of the small groups teaching this course, where they are invariably ranked as best teachers. Many have won exemplary teaching awards and have been selected to provide medical student remediation of clinical deficits for at-risk students.

Second-year students take Medical Ethics, a course where the classroom portion is taught by ethics faculty in our Department of Community Health and Family Medicine (CHFM), and the small-group sessions, in which eight students meet weekly for two hours, are primarily physician-led. CHFM faculty members are preceptors for more than half of these small groups. Student feedback indicates that they particularly
enjoy stories from faculty of real-life ethical dilemmas drawn from years in family medicine. One small-group leader states, “I’ve developed close relationships with these students and have included having dinners at my home for the groups during the weeks the students studied ethics as it pertains to obstetrics and gynecology. I’ve practiced obstetrics as a family physician, and this really helps me lead this part of our discussion. But what makes the dinners at my home really special for the students is their ability to include my OB/Gyn husband in the discussions as well. The relationships I’ve formed with students from my ethics groups have resulted in friendships that continue and in more formal mentorships in my field of family medicine.”

The third year includes a required six-week rotation in family medicine. The rotation begins with an orientation presented by several CHFM faculty members, who discuss their career paths and the many options available for family medicine physicians. We have family physicians discuss their reasons for entering family medicine, their practice experiences in a variety of practice settings and how they successfully managed changing family needs and career demands over the years. Students receive a brochure titled “What Every Medical Student Should Know” to share information about the following:

- There is a vital need for family physicians (and an impending severe shortage!)
- Patients appreciate that family physicians can care for more than 90 percent of their medical problems
- Family physicians are crucial to the U.S. health care system
- Practicing family medicine is an enjoyable, rewarding career
- Family medicine offers excellent income potential
- Family physicians deal with the greatest variety of patient problems
- Family physicians can tailor their practice to their interests, such as women’s health, geriatrics, adolescents or sports medicine
- The University of Florida has excellent residency programs in family medicine

Students then typically rotate through two different family medicine clinics (three weeks in each) and have a week of inpatient exposure as well.

In the fourth year, CHFM offers a variety of elective experiences, as well as a sub internship on our inpatient service. These courses are quite popular, with more than two-thirds of each class taking one or more of our department’s fourth-year courses.

In addition, we also nurture and support our Family Medicine Interest Group (FMIG). Each year, FMIG offers a series of noon conferences to educate students about different aspects of a career in family medicine. FMIG also provides important opportunities for involvement. This includes organizing local workshops for students, helping with service projects and involvement in the annual Kansas City meeting. We have a history of having outstanding medical student support for this organization backed by committed faculty. Our students go on to become leaders in family medicine. We are indebted to the FAFP, without whose support our FMIG would be far less effective.

Are we having an impact? The graph below shows the number of students at UF entering family medicine each year during the past 11 years. This year, 12 students are pursuing matches in family medicine, exceeded by only one specialty at UF (pediatrics) — an encouraging trend we hope will continue!

![Number of UF Students entering Family Medicine](image)