

Planting Seeds

The Impact of MassAHEC's Rural Health Scholars Program on Medical Student Career Choice in Family Medicine for the Last Twenty Years



Our Team

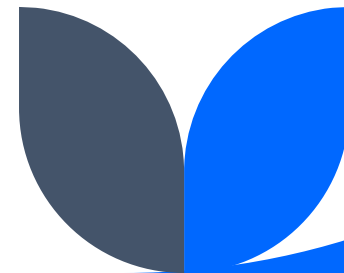
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Disclaimers and COI

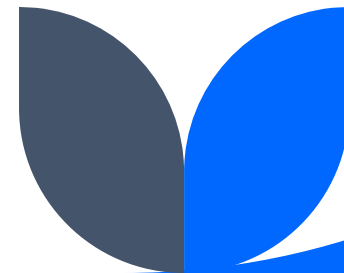
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Session Objectives

1. Participants will be able to explain how to develop an optional longitudinal enrichment elective focused on rural and primary care.
2. Participants will understand the 3-4 key learning opportunities that had the most influence on students.
3. Participants will have an opportunity to talk with currently enrolled Rural Health Scholars and our State Office of Rural Health representatives who have partnered with the program since its inception.



Background

Since 2000, MassAHEC's Rural Health Scholars program (RHS) at UMass Chan Medical School has provided medical students with an opportunity to learn about and gain experience in rural medicine.

The RHS is an optional longitudinal, interprofessional learning experience that combines didactics, clinical work, and community-based learning opportunities in Massachusetts' rural and small towns with opportunities in other states.

Fulfills HRSA AHEC Scholars requirements of two years of participation during 1st and 2nd years of medical school with an ongoing relationship until graduation.



Highlights of Rural Health Scholars

Unique opportunities in rural and small-town practices

Community engagement activities

Alums in rural communities for electives/rotations

Participation in rural community partnerships

Hands-on skills workshops

New England Rural Health Association student membership

Sample RHS Events Fall 2024

8/21 5:30-7:30 pm *Wound Care Session* - Albert Sherman Multipurpose Room

9/7 9:30 am - 2 pm *2024 Rural Health Student Summit* - New England Rural Health Association - Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center

9/24 6-7:15 pm *Rural Massachusetts: Where is it and Why Does it Matter?*

9/28 2 pm - 9/29 11:00 am *RHS Retreat Good Thyme Farm* - Ashburnham, MA

10/19 10:30 am - 2 pm *Approach to and Application of Learning about a Community* - Barre, MA

10/25 *Potluck Dinner and Summer Opportunity Discussion* - Chez Dr. Hajj, West Boylston

11/6-7 *New England Rural Health Association Annual Meeting: Expanding Strategies for Rural Stability* - Mystic, CT

11/?? *Exploring a Small Hospital: The Case of Wing Hospital*

12/?? *Approaches to Advocating for/with Rural Communities*

Join Us!



Study Purpose

Of 136 RHS students who have graduated since 2005, 42 (31.1%) opted to practice Family Medicine.

This proportion is higher than the overall UMass Chan's student body for that period as well as the national average.



To better understand the impact of the RHS on graduates' careers, we aimed to survey all RHS graduates (n=42) who either plan to (n=3) or currently practice (n=39) Family Medicine.

Literature

Alavi M, Ho T, Stisher C, et al. Factors That Influence Student Choice in Family Medicine: A National Focus Group. *Fam Med*. 2019;51(2):143-148. <https://doi.org/10.22454/FamMed.2019.927833>.

Three key issues were echoed across focus groups. The most consistently identified factor was the need for high-quality family medicine preceptors who express enthusiasm for the field and practice full-scope family medicine exhibiting the breadth of this specialty. The second highly praised factor was the value of a rural family medicine experience, mainly due to the broad scope of practice. Lastly, students reiterated the importance of top-down institutional support of primary care, specifically family medicine. This was best highlighted when family medicine faculty were integrated into the preclinical curriculum.

Kane KY, Quinn KJ, Stevermer JJ, et al. Summer in the country: changes in medical students' perceptions following an innovative rural community experience. *Acad Med*. 2013;88(8):1157-1163.

This program has positively influenced students' perceptions of rural practice and lifestyle and increased their interest in rural practice. Participants entered primary care and family medicine residencies at higher rates than nonparticipants, and nearly half started their medical practices in rural locations. Replicating this program may increase interest in rural medicine and address rural physician workforce needs.

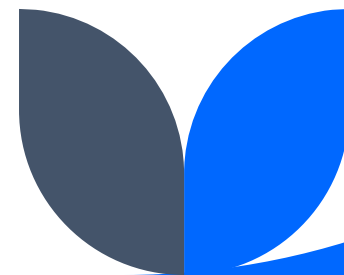
Methods

Surveys consisted of 11 to 14 questions depending on level of participant (medical student, resident/fellow, or practicing physician), with two reminders sent to increase completion.

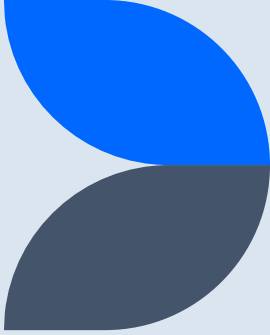
Of 38 graduates with viable email contacts, 32 completed the survey, with a response rate of 84.21%.

Survey Question Domains

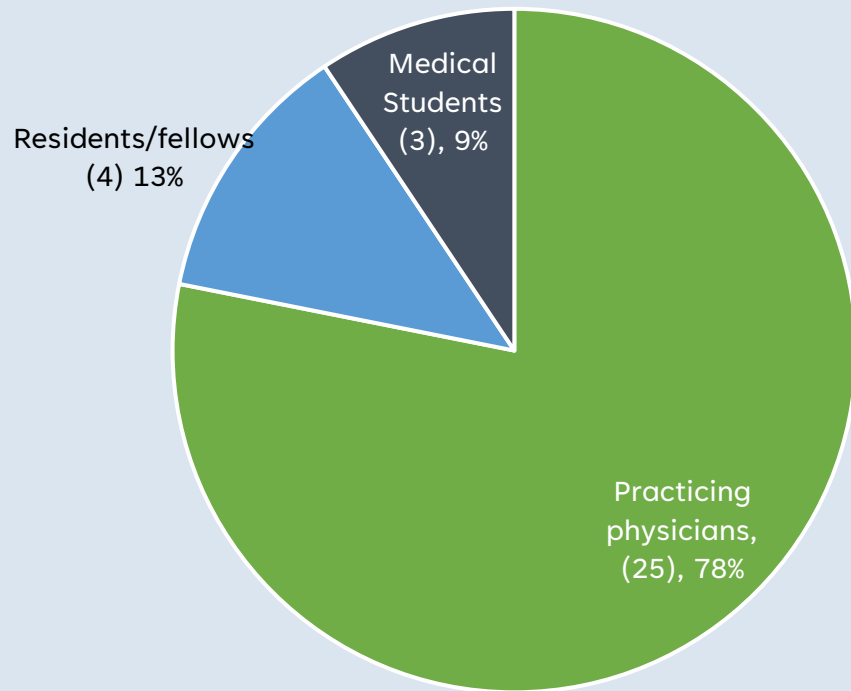
1. Current or prospective practice variables
2. Current teaching efforts
3. Impact of RHS on medical school education
4. Influence of RHS on specialty and career choices



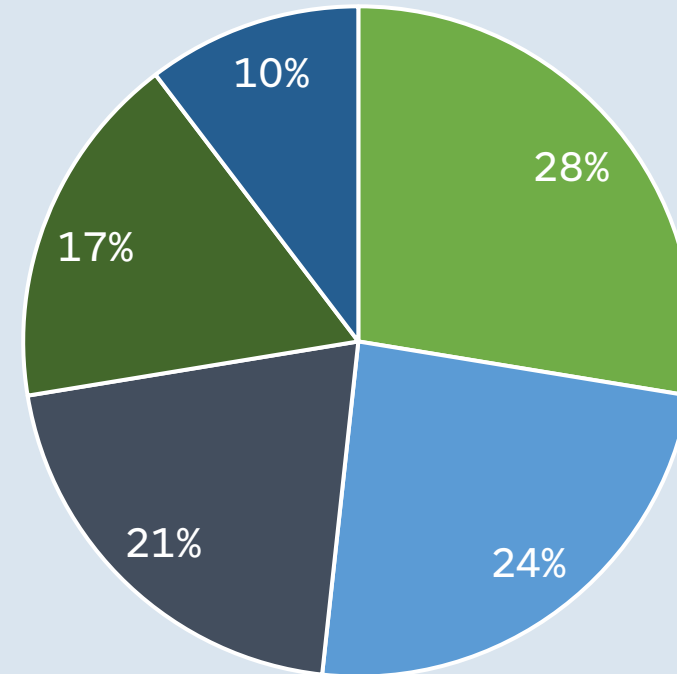
Respondents (n=32)



Professional Level

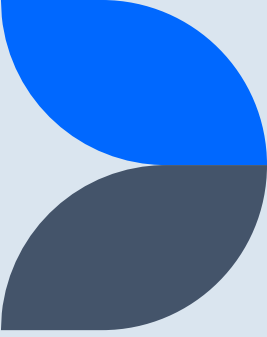


Current Practice Location

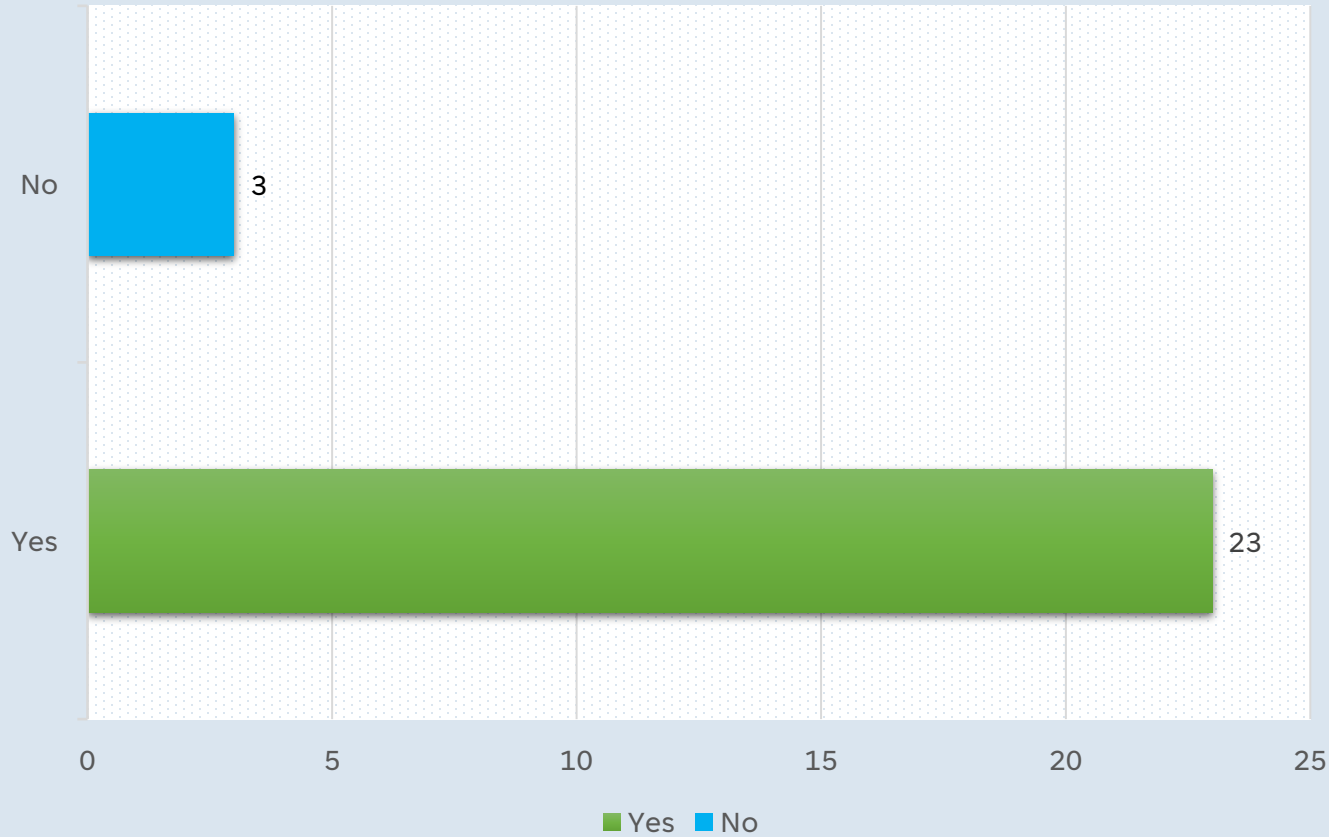


■ Urban ■ Suburban ■ Small town ■ Mixed ■ Rural

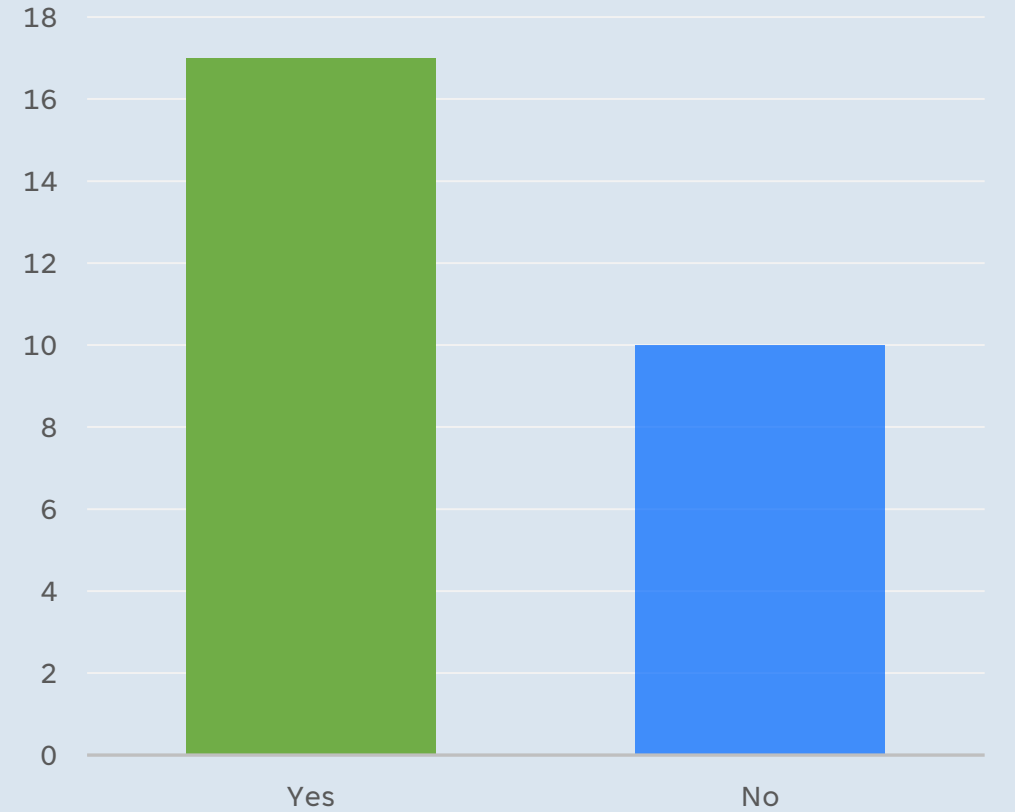
Current Practice



Caring for Underserved Populations



Currently Teach Learners



Results: Impact of RHS on Medical Education

Did RHS better prepare you to care for rural patients?
Showed me that rural and inner city had a lot of overlap in terms of access. Rural and inner city had a lot of overlap in terms of

SDG
RHS brought me into the homes and workplaces of rural individuals. Seeing their living conditions and what they do for

work
result
[RHS] was a huge inspiration to me, especially as a first year student. The lectures from rural practitioners, the opportunity to do both my LPP and my 3rd year FM clerkship in Barre and the opportunity to connect with a group of students with similar interests were all critical to my development through

med
I better understood how to deliver comprehensive care for patients who may not have easy access to specialty care.

Results: Impact on Career

Did you enter medical school intending to practice FM?

1. Yes (n=15)
2. No (n=11)

Did the Rural Health Scholars program either directly or indirectly influence your interest in specializing in Family Medicine?

1. Yes (n=25)
2. No (n=2)

How?

- Showed me the variety of primary care. How being a doctor meant being a community advocate, even organizer.
- Family Medicine is a unique field capable of meeting the general needs...especially in rural and underserved areas
- Seeing the scope of practice in rural areas and the connections made between attendings and their patients in this setting drew me to FM
- Connections with other students who had similar interests were important, learning about the diverse practice options for FM docs
- Learning more about FM and its scope brought it more on my radar and eventually became my choice!

Results: Most Influential Experiences by Respondent Status

Practicing Physician

Increased ownership over more care realms that otherwise would be farmed to specialists in other settings

Community of like-minded medical students and physician leaders

Resident/Fellow

Opportunity to rotate with Indian Health Service

4 yrs of friendly mentorship

Strong relationships with patients

Medical Student

Rural health work is social justice work

Easier to try [rural practice] out in medical school compared to committing in residency, so this provided a way to get my feet wet



Discussion



Results indicate that specialized rural/small town medicine experiences increase the likelihood that students will elect to practice Family Medicine in both rural and urban settings



Graduates provided invaluable insight into variables from the RHS program that influenced their career decisions

Scope of practice, advocacy, and exposure to rural and small-town ways of life most influential



Partnerships are crucial to the success of RHS

CHCs, rural hospitals, farms, graduates, state offices of rural health, NERHA, and AHECs across the country

Conclusion

The RHS elective offers opportunities – research, advocacy, social – to experience rural life and medicine

Getting to students in their 1 and 2 years of medical school is decisive

Identified variables can be generalized or adapted to other schools seeking to increase the proportion of their graduates who select family medicine and rural practice

Next steps: current UMass Chan students will be conducting phone interviews with RHS alums to further our understanding of the impact of RHS in their career



More Questions?

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