



Rural Medical Scholars Program: Filling the Gap for Healthcare and Public Health Leaders in Mississippi

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ABSTRACT

Mississippi has the lowest number of physicians per capita in the nation, limiting access to healthcare and public health services. Participants complete evaluations to assess program satisfaction and intention to pursue healthcare careers, and RMS faculty survey RMS alumni annually to assess education or placement in health-related fields. A total of 387 students have participated in Rural Medical Scholars since the program began. A total of 41 or (<10%) completed or are enrolled in medical school. Follow-up information shows that 80% of our medical school graduates entered primary care residency programs and 17% chose family medicine as their area of specialty. Approximately 71% have completed or are enrolled in health-related careers, likewise others are pursuing STEM fields.

BACKGROUND

In response, to Mississippi's low number of physicians per capita and limited access to healthcare, Mississippi State University Extension began offering the Rural Medical Scholars (RMS) program in 1998 to "grow local docs" by identifying competitive rising high school seniors interested in the field of medicine. The scholars are admitted to MSU for one summer term, earn 7 pre-medicine college credits, shadow healthcare providers, and engage in workshops emphasizing preventive medicine, health behavior change, and pre-professional development. The program serves a dual purpose of directing scholars along a pathway to success in healthcare or toward another career if the healthcare field is not for them.

OBJECTIVES

- To describe the components of rural medical scholars as it relates to filling the gap for healthcare and public health leaders in Mississippi
- To identify the possible benefits of RMS or a program like it for other states in the US

BENEFITS

- Enhances resume for college and job opportunities
- Improves communication and socialization skills
- Instills self-discipline related to time management and study skills
- Increases Self-efficacy
- Experience helps clarify future career choice
- Promotes teamwork among peers
- Opportunity to make friends with similar interests

METHODS

Rural Medical Scholars are recruited on a statewide basis through press releases, social media, radio and web-based marketing. Additionally, high school counselors and health science programs are sent information packets to share with rising high school seniors. County Extension Agents and various partnering organizations distribute information.

Applicants submit a biosketch including academic performance, out-of-school activities, and essay detailing their interest in RMS. Scholars are selected by a blinded review panel using a rubric for the scoring process.

RMS Counselors serve as mentors and reside with the scholars in the dorms throughout the summer term. The scholars also have access to RMS tutors that facilitate the mandated weekly study sessions to ensure discipline, time management and successful completion of coursework.

An orientation workshop is held prior to the start of classes focusing on communication skills, teamwork, study skills and critical thinking. Throughout the program various workshops promoting preventive and health behavior change are held promoting experimental learning.

Scholars are trained and earn certification as Jr. Master Wellness Volunteers that enables them to return to their communities and provide accurate health promotion information for improving health literacy leading to healthy choices and lifestyle changes.

Scholars shadow primary care physicians and some sub-specialties. This experience gives them the opportunity to experience the day work of a physician and offers communication skill building in a professional setting.

Participants complete evaluations to assess program satisfaction and intention to pursue healthcare careers.

RMS faculty survey RMS alumni annually to assess education or placement in health-related fields.

RESULTS

Program Impact

- 387 students have participated in the program
- 26% of participants have been minorities
- 60% of participants are female; 40% are male
- 41 have completed or presently enrolled in medical school
- 35 are practicing physicians (residency or private practice as of today)
- 28 physicians are practicing in primary care
- 12 physicians are practicing in Mississippi
- Approximately 71% of our graduates are pursuing health-related careers
- Others are pursuing careers in nursing, pharmacy, dentistry, counseling, physical or occupational therapy, medical research, public health, or STEM-related careers in mechanical, biological, or chemical engineering, technology or math.
- Physicians in a 60 mile radius voluntarily participate in the program by providing weekly shadowing experiences.
 - More than 100 physicians have participated since the program began
 - Each year 30 to 50 participate

Fall 2017 Figures

CONCLUSIONS

RMS has assisted high school seniors in determining if they want to pursue a health-related career. This program, replicable in other states, may help address healthcare workforce shortages across the US.

Moving forward, Rural Medical Scholars will be changing its scope in FY2018 to Rural Medical & Science Scholars. The program will continue to focus on "growing local docs" but will offer additional experiences to help broaden a knowledge base in STEM careers as well as opportunities in the healthcare field. The expansion of the program's vision will help ensure a strong and passionate workforce for the long-term goals of improving access to healthcare and improving Mississippi's science-based economy.

"I got a lot of my vision and drive for what I want to do in medicine from this program as a participant."
Ben Rushing
Senior Biological Engineering Major
RMS Class of 2013

"Those who can should. RMS showed me I can."
Sonya Shipley, M.D.
Family Medicine
RMS Class of 1999