

MISSISSIPPI LANDMARKS

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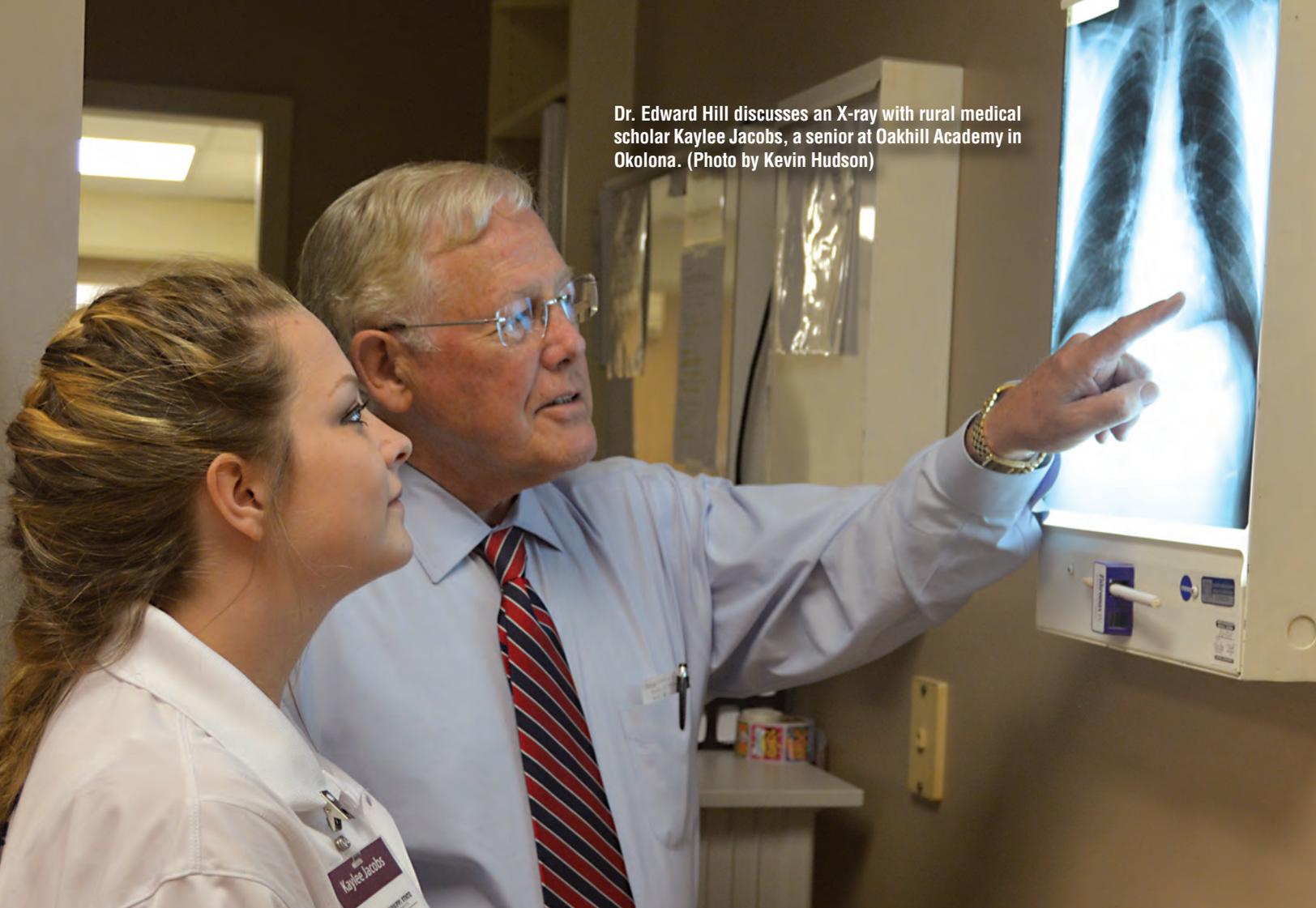
RURAL MEDICAL SCHOLARS SERVE THE MISSISSIPPI MASSES

Research, Education, and Extension in the Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine



Mississippi State University

Dr. Edward Hill discusses an X-ray with rural medical scholar Kaylee Jacobs, a senior at Oakhill Academy in Okolona. (Photo by Kevin Hudson)



Rural Medical Scholars Program

Works to Produce More Primary-Care Doctors for Mississippi

Dr. Deke Barron works alongside veteran practitioner Dr. Edward Hill as they allow future medical students to shadow their activities in the Family Medicine Residency Center in Tupelo, Mississippi.

When Barron was a rising high-school senior considering a medical career in 2003, he took part in the MSU Extension Rural Medical Scholars (RMS) Program. The Hernando, Mississippi, native returned as an RMS counselor in 2007 and 2010. The 5-week summer program at Mississippi State seeks to identify and encourage the state's future primary-care doctors.

"I remember the shadowing experience as being very helpful when I was making career decisions," said Barron, a 2014 medical-school graduate who is completing his third year of residency at the North Mississippi Medical Center in Tupelo.

Hill is not surprised to hear Barron's positive review of the RMS Program. He has supported the program since its first year in 1998 by recruiting doctors to be shadowed by participating scholars.

"Most doctors are very willing to participate because they recognize the importance of the shadowing experience," Hill said. "Watching a doctor is totally different from the classroom experience and certainly impacts decisions on the type of medical career the student wants to pursue."



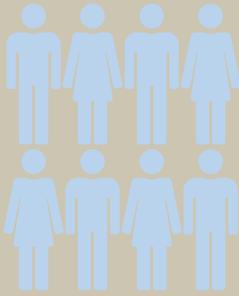
Photo by Kevin Hudson

"I remember the shadowing experience as being very helpful when I was making career decisions."

— Dr. Deke Barron,
2003 Rural Medical Scholar



RURAL MEDICAL SCHOLARS SERVE THE MISSISSIPPI MASSES



CURRENTLY
6.0 PHYSICIANS PER **10,000** MISSISSIPPI RESIDENTS

1,656: NUMBER OF ACTIVE PHYSICIANS NEEDED IN MISSISSIPPI TO MEET THE NATIONAL AVERAGE OF **8.3** ACTIVE PHYSICIANS PER **10,000** RESIDENTS

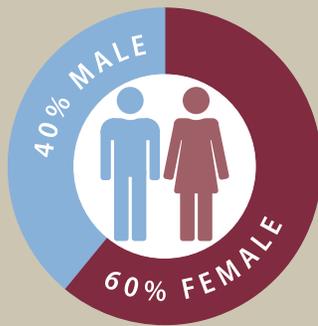
367 STUDENTS HAVE PARTICIPATED IN RURAL MEDICAL SCHOLARS SINCE THE PROGRAM BEGAN IN 1998

6,250 NEW NURSES NEEDED IN MISSISSIPPI BETWEEN 2010 AND 2020



37 RMS PARTICIPANTS HAVE ENTERED MEDICAL SCHOOL

75% OF THE RMS PARTICIPANTS WHO HAVE GRADUATED FROM MEDICAL SCHOOL ARE PRIMARY CARE PROVIDERS



71% OF RMS PARTICIPANTS PURSUE HEALTH-RELATED CAREERS

SOURCES: Office of Mississippi Physician Workforce and Mississippi Center for Health Workforce (2014 data)

Additionally, Hill pointed to the Hippocratic oath that all doctors take. The second line in the oath calls for doctors to “gladly share such knowledge as is mine with those who are to follow.”

“Mississippi has a critical need for primary-care doctors, which include family practitioners, pediatrics, internal medicine, and obstetrics/gynecology,” Hill said. “We can reduce medical costs and provide higher quality of care when we have adequate numbers of physicians to serve all our communities.”

Hill’s commitment to the RMS Program extends to future needs. To improve the overall health of Mississippians, he wants to see efforts that reach younger students with messages that will guide them to healthy lifestyles and possible medical careers.

“The earlier you start, the better,” Hill said. “We need health education from prekindergarten on up. The need for more primary-care doctors goes hand in hand with public health. Plus, when there is a shortage of doctors, there is a greater chance of burnout.”

Barron does not have as many years of experience as Hill, but he recognizes the need to continue learning from veteran practitioners. He also remembers the process of making career decisions.

A 2012 RMS participant, Abby Matthews of Summit, Mississippi, worked this summer as one of the two counselors for the 2016 scholars. She said the program and counselors stress the value of students focusing on rural communities.

“We want to convince them that rural communities are worth the effort,” she said. “Ideally, rural communities need people who already appreciate small-town living.”

Matthews received a competitive scholarship from the Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Program, which provides funding for medical school and academic enrichment, along with faculty and physician mentoring. She learned about the scholarship program when she participated in RMS and applied during her college undergraduate years.

Matthews, working as the RMS Program’s female counselor, guided the scholars around the MSU campus, to doctors’ offices, and through college biology and sociology classes.

The scholars pelt their counselors with questions such as, “What’s the MCAT like?” or “How do you improve your medical-school application?”



Rural medical scholars (top, left photo) work with a simulation dummy at the University of Mississippi School of Medicine Simulation and Interpersonal Education Center. The lab is used to simulate various emergencies to train medical students. (Photo Submitted)

Dr. Steven Brandon (top, right photo) of The Family Clinic in Starkville talks to Tyler Wilson, a senior at Columbus High School, during a shadowing experience. (Photo by Kevin Hudson)

Abby Matthews (bottom photo) was a 2012 rural medical scholar and returned to serve as a counselor in the 2016 program. (Photo by Kevin Hudson)



Both of those questions are high on Matthews's list, as well. She will earn her undergraduate degree in May 2017 and has already been accepted to early-entry admissions status for medical school.

"It can be overwhelming for them when they consider all they need to do to get into med school—good grades, shadowing experiences, campus involvement, and volunteer work," Matthews explained. "We try to reassure them that it's possible to manage their schedules, be involved, and keep their grades up."

Ben Rushing, a 2013 medical scholar, returned this year to assist students as their biology tutor.

"My job was to review their lessons with them until they felt comfortable with the material, but we also talked a lot about the college experience," Rushing said. "They need to understand that good grades will get their foot in the door, but then they need to be active in other areas to be well-rounded."

Rushing said he tried to listen to each scholar and understand individual struggles and successes.

"It was fun to see the program from another level," he added. "As a scholar, you can't see the big picture. Now, I see a little more but know there will be more to come. It was also interesting to see what it takes for the program to accomplish its goals. I'm glad participants didn't just benefit from the experience, but they also enjoyed it."

The Monticello, Mississippi, native said he hopes the program convinced the future medical professionals to return to rural communities across the state.

"The Rural Medical Scholars Program engages quality Mississippi high school students in an effort to interest them in primary medical care," said Dr. Will Evans Jr., head of the MSU Department of Food Science, Nutrition, and Health Promotion. "The goal of RMS is to increase the number of 'home-grown' rural medical physicians in Mississippi."