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Contact Bill Taylor, Asst. Director, News Services
taylorb@ferris.edu, (231) 591-2065 or 591-5604

Ferris Pharmacy students assist Michigan State Area Health Education Center

BIG RAPIDS – College of Pharmacy students from Ferris State University are helping the medically underserved in Michigan at one of four sites established under the Michigan State Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Program.

Two Ferris pharmacy students are currently working in the Ferguson Adult Health Center, one of the Cherry Street Health Services clinics in Grand Rapids. The clinic at the Cherry Street Health Center houses the Western AHEC office, according to Cambria DeHoag.

Dr. DeHoag, an associate professor of pharmacy practice at the Ferris College of Pharmacy off-campus site in Grand Rapids, serves as a preceptor for Ferris' AHEC students. Two new students rotate to the site every two months, and 16 students in all have served there since the program began.

DeHoag said that from one to four Ferris students would be placed later this year in a model teaching nursing home that is being developed and implemented as part of the AHEC program. In addition, she noted that discussions have been held regarding the establishment of a telepharmacy network for selected federally-qualified Family Health Centers, and that faculty involvement in the program will increase in the two remaining years of the grant.

AHEC, which aims to increase the number of health care providers to the populations of underserved areas of Michigan, is funded through a three-year grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and is matched by state and local funds. The AHEC mission is to enhance access to quality health care, particularly primary and preventive care, by improving the supply and distribution of health care professionals through community/academic educational partnerships.

The AHEC coordinating office at Michigan State University is supplemented by the regional sites in Grand Rapids, Okemos and Marquette. More than three-quarters of Michigan's counties are designated by the National Center for Health Workforce Analysis (NCHWA) as either a partial or full county Medically Underserved Area/Population, and NCHWA estimates that almost a third of Michigan's citizens live in communities with a severe shortage of primary care physicians.

The state is facing numerous health care delivery problems, including an increasing number of uninsured, a growing need for health professionals in underserved communities, and special areas of need such as access to pharmacy services. It is hoped that AHEC will promote a high level of interest by future health professionals to locate and provide service in medically underserved communities across Michigan.

Each of the three AHEC Centers will assess the health personnel needs of its area and assist in the planning and development of training programs to meet such needs. The Centers will partner with existing programs in their communities as they work to determine these needs. Armed with this information, they will collaborate with area health professions training programs to encourage placement in underserved areas.



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