

A Model Program

Family medicine clerkship program puts students

John Mikell hasn't decided what specialty to pursue, but if he chooses a career in family medicine, he'll be well-prepared.

The third-year student in the Medical College of Georgia's School of Medicine recently completed his rotation in the Department of Family Medicine's required third-year clerkship program.

The nationally known program, now entering its third decade, gives students a taste of what it's like outside of an academic medical center – where a large portion of health care is provided by community-based primary care physicians.

“It gives us a real feel for how the front lines of medicine operate,” Mr. Mikell said.

That experience is exactly what educators had in mind when they created the clerkship program in 1980, said Dr. Joseph Hobbs, chair of the Department of Family Medicine.

“Medical schools have traditionally used their own backyard to teach their students, but that backyard often doesn't look like the reality of practice in the community,” he said. “The vast majority of students will eventually go into a community practice, whether they go into family medicine, primary care or other specialties, so they need to see how community practices really work.”

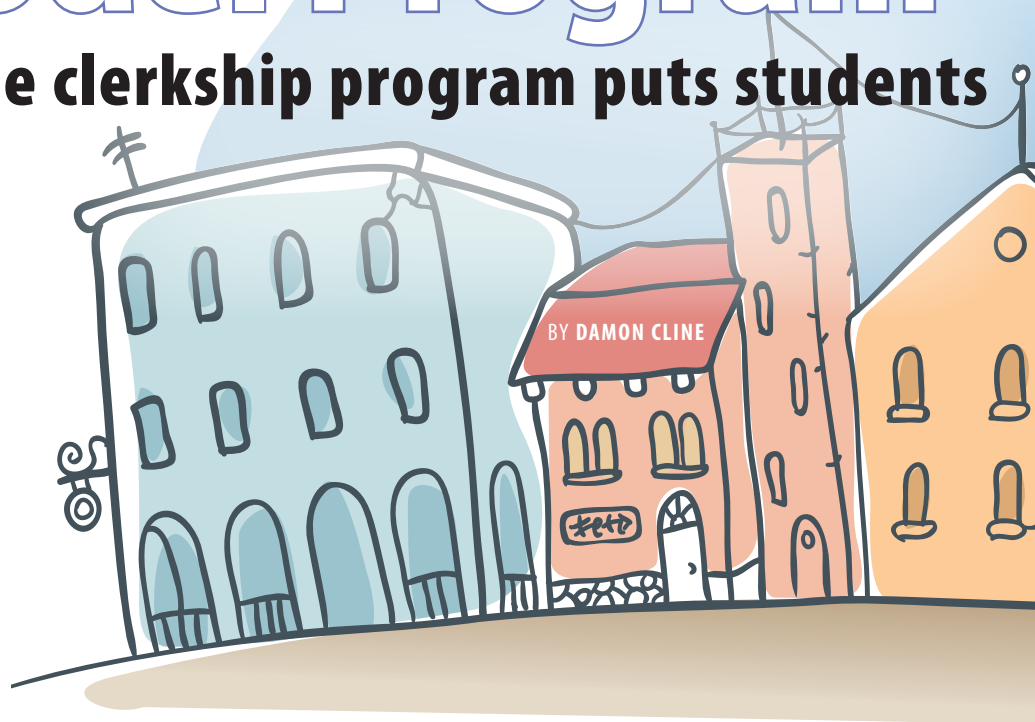
Crucial to the program's success are the 75 community primary care physicians, who along with MCG's Family Medicine faculty, oversee students during the intensive six weeks they spend at one of 22 clerkship teaching sites throughout the state. The sites range from group practices in rural and suburban areas and include a community health

center network and MCG's Family Medicine faculty practice. There also are two community-based residency programs and a military-based residency program.

The community physicians are more than traditional “preceptors” – they are associate faculty members in the Department of Family Medicine. They, along with the academic faculty, are responsible for helping develop and implement major parts of the program's curriculum.

“We've put together a unique curriculum of what we think students ought to see during those six weeks,” said Dr. Jon Reimer, an Augusta physician who oversaw Mr. Mikell's clerkship. “We meet each year and refine it to make sure the clerkship is as much like the real world as possible.”

Dr. Reimer, who last year was named Educator of the Year by the Georgia Academy of Family Physicians, has



in the heart of the community



Dr. Jon Reimer (right), an Augusta physician and clinical professor in the Department of Family Medicine, observes third-year student John Mikell checking the pulse of a patient during his third-year family medicine clerkship.

participated in the clerkship program since its inception. Clerkship coordinator Libby Poteet said Dr. Reimer's length of service is not unusual in the program.

"Most of them have been with us for many, many years," she said. "They really have ownership of the program because they were involved early in its creation."

The alliance forged between the Department of Family Medicine and its network of community-based physicians has developed into a model that has since been replicated at other medical schools across the country.

"It clearly continues to be a model nearly three decades after its inception," said Dr. Elizabeth Garrett, predoctoral director for the University of Missouri's Family & Community Medicine Department, past president of the Society of Teachers of Family Medicine and current president of the American Board of Family Medicine.

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MCG's program is not designed to be a recruiting tool for primary care, but sometimes that's a byproduct.

Dr. Randy Colvin, a 1995 School of Medicine graduate, decided to become a family physician after his clerkship under Dr. Reimer's supervision. He is now a clinical assistant professor in the program and runs the clerkship at the Center for Primary Care's Crossroads office in suburban Augusta. "It really solidified my interest in family medicine," Dr. Colvin. "Now, I look at teaching as giving back to MCG and helping encourage students to go into family medicine."

Programming efforts for the community-based clerkship were initially developed under the leadership of Dr. Ohlen Wilson, who came to MCG in the late 1970s to oversee an educational partnership with a network of rural clinics and an elective summer clinical preceptorship program. Dr. Wilson, who spent 22 years practicing primary care medicine in rural South Georgia, was motivated by conversations with residents in rural Warrenton, Ga., about the shortage of family physicians in their area.

This educational/service program boosted medical resources in the rural area, gave students their first exposure to community-based medicine and was the launch pad for MCG's third-year family medicine clerkship.

"In my opinion, I thought it would be one of the bright spots in their training," said Dr. Wilson, who has since retired to his native Virginia. "They would get more first-time exposure to patients. I didn't see how it could not be successful."

He and Dr. Joseph W. Tollison, who retired as chair of the Department of Family Medicine in 1998, along with other Family Medicine faculty members and staff crisscrossed Georgia to recruit community-based family physicians to participate in the new clerkship. Dr. Tollison, who recently retired as senior vice president of the American Board of Family Medicine, said participation was, and remains, a major commitment on the part of the community-based physicians.

"These folks are busy family physicians," he said. "They give of themselves because they have a passion for the field of medicine and for MCG students."

Dr. Hobbs said the clerkship not only prepares students to work in community settings, but gives them early exposure to the larger role they will play in these communities.

"In smaller communities, students are able to see firsthand how an individual physician can be involved directly or indirectly in a significant part of the overall health care of a population," he said. "He or she is engaged in the community in a fashion that makes them recognizable outside their office or hospital as a physician, whether it's at church or at a football game on a Saturday night." ■

Family medicine chair participates in national clerkship task force

Dr. Joseph Hobbs' leadership extends well beyond the confines of the School of Medicine's Department of Family Medicine.

The department professor and chair is a national leader in educational policy, as evidenced by his appointment to a national task force charged with creating a national family medicine clerkship curriculum.

"My presence on that committee has a lot to do with the success of the clerkship network we have put together," Dr. Hobbs said.

The nine-member task force, the Family Medicine Clerkship Core Content Curriculum, was created by the Society of Teachers of Family Medicine to determine the content that should comprise a national family medicine curriculum. The group's findings are to be published in *Family Medicine* magazine in April 2010.

Dr. Hobbs, a former society president, was also recently selected as one of three U.S. family medicine physicians for the society's Bishop Leadership Program, a one-year fellowship that prepares senior academic physicians and educators for careers in top academic medicine posts. He also received the society's 2007 Recognition Award for outstanding contributions to family medicine and family medicine education.

"In an era where the need for family physicians is growing, while student career choices in primary care are simultaneously waning, leadership is required. Our school is fortunate indeed to have a nationally respected leader in Family Medicine in Joseph Hobbs," said Dr. D. Douglas Miller, MCG School of Medicine dean. "The future of U.S. health care depends on its transformation to create a patient-centered medical home for all Americans. Family physicians like Joseph Hobbs are leading the way."

As a Bishop fellow, Dr. Hobbs, who serves as the School of Medicine's senior associate dean for primary care and community affairs, will automatically become a fellow of the American Council on Education.

Dr. Hobbs, the Joseph W. Tollison, M.D., Distinguished Chair, currently serves as a board member of the Council on Graduate Medical Education and is past treasurer of the American Board of Family Medicine, the second-largest medical specialty board in the United States.

