



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

College of Medicine

Phoenix

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# RURAL HEALTH PROFESSIONS PROGRAM (RHPP) CERTIFICATE OF DISTINCTION

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## **RHPP Vision**

Promoting medical practice in rural Arizona through medical student education and rural learning experiences.

## **RHPP Goals**

- Increase the number of University of Arizona COM—Phoenix (UArizona College of Medicine—Phoenix) graduates who practice in a rural setting.
- Prepare medical students for the rewards, challenges, and unique patient needs of rural medical practice.
- Contribute to a college of medicine environment that promotes future rural practice.
- Develop collaborative relationships with rural communities and faculty.

## **Background**

In the mid 1990s, the Arizona government addressed the chronic shortage of rural Arizona physicians by passing legislation requiring fifteen UArizona College of Medicine—Phoenix medical students complete four-week rural educational experiences during medical school. The goal was to increase the numbers who would pursue rural practice. The development and expansion of UArizona College of Medicine—Phoenix RHPP underscores the importance the COM-P places on preparing medical students to care for rural and underserved populations and of fulfilling this legislative directive.

## **RHPP Rural Certificate of Distinction (COD)**

The Rural COD recognizes students who demonstrate strong commitment to future rural medical practice. Students admitted to the Rural COD undertake a 4-year course of preparation that includes seminars, mentorship, rural clerkship and pre-clerkship clinical experiences among other requirements described later in this document. In addition to the supplemental medical preparation, completion of the Rural COD leads to Dean’s Letter recognition and receipt of a Distinction Track in Rural Health being noted on the UArizona College of Medicine—Phoenix transcript.

## **Admission to the Rural COD**

Rural COD candidates complete a short application by the first Friday in August. Prior to application, students may attend early sessions of the longitudinal rural seminar series that begin Summer of Year 1. Applicants can then weigh their interest in the Rural COD ahead of the application deadline. RHPP staff will select successful applicants, favoring criteria that best predict future rural practice such as upbringing in a rural setting, expressing a credible desire to go into rural practice, and plans for a primary care or general surgery career.

Failing to meet the application deadline will not disqualify an applicant. Late applications will be considered depending on site availability, student ability to meet COD requirements, and the discretion of the RHPP Director. It should be noted that apart from the COD, many rural opportunities remain available to students not participating in the COD, including clerkship and clinical elective rural placements. Not all students know in their first semester their future practice plans while others might not have gained admission to the Rural COD yet plan to practice in a rural setting. The educational resources of RHPP are available to all students at all levels of medical school training.

## **Curriculum Years 1 and 2**

1. Rural COD students match with a faculty mentor who has an interest and experience in rural medical practice. Faculty mentors discuss concerns, answer questions, and encourage eventual rural practice. Mentor-COD student meetings, which may be conducted in person, by phone, or via teleconference, are required to take place at least quarterly starting in Year 3.
2. Sixteen ungraded Rural Seminars are presented across a two-year cycle. While seminars are open to the wider College community, 70 percent attendance is required of Rural COD students during Years 1 and 2. Seminar requirements may be satisfied through approved lectures, skills training, group discussions, web-based learning modules, community activities, and rural conferences. Past Rural COD Seminars have included wide ranging subject matter including interactive presentations with practicing rural physicians, experts on loan repayment programs (both State and Federal), cultural experts on treatment of Native patients, and policy experts on the Affordable Care Act:

Web-based sessions may be available to make up for two missed live sessions. Attendance will be taken and tracked for Rural COD participants. Post-test evaluations gathered from all session participants are conducted at each meeting to assess session effectiveness.

3. A four-week rural Personalized Active Learning (PAL) block placement at the end of Year 1 provides Rural COD students early rural clinical experience at the site to which they will ideally return for Year 3 clerkships. All Year 1 students have completed a core set of clinical skills in the Doctoring course and are therefore ready to engage in patient care. Site placements are determined by RHPP staff and are based on student ranked preferences, availability, and Rural COD program needs.

4. Effective for the graduating class 2023, students have the option of completing a rural SP or completing a non-rural SP in addition to an equivalent rural related project. Moreover, students will be given the following two options for completing the rural project:
  - Pursuing a rural subject matter SP as approved by RHPP Director
  - Choosing non-rural subject matter SP AND completing one of the following equivalency projects preapproved by the RHPP Director:
    - a. QI project based in a rural clinical practice
    - b. A rural-related case study submitted for publication
    - c. A rural community needs assessment (in the primary community in which student has been placed)
    - d. An approved service-learning project within the rural placement community, completion of the project, and submission of a statement of outcomes related to the project.
    - e. AHEC Scholars Program participation (for explanation see “Added Dimensions” section of this document).

### **Curriculum Year 3**

Many rural sites and rural faculty have been integrated into the COM-P rural training network. Specialty offerings and duration of rural clinical experiences depend on what a rural community is able to offer. In some communities the duration will be 13-weeks and consists of four weeks internal medicine, six weeks of family medicine, and three weeks of pediatrics. Other sites can provide rural clinical training in those specialties noted above as well as psychiatry, emergency medicine, obstetrics and surgery for a total of 29 weeks of rural clinical training. The total required duration of rural clerkship placement will therefore be dictated by what rotation the site can offer but may range from 13 to 32 weeks. The site-specific requirements will be discussed with students prior to initial placement in the PAL block.

Upon completion of the rural clerkship experience, the COD student will submit a required four-page single-spaced reflection paper based on question prompts meant to facilitate a consolidation and integration of rural rotation experiences.

RHPP staff will advocate for a schedule that accommodates rural medical school experience with a minimum of interruptions and excessive back and forth travel. Staff will also support efforts to develop rural videoconference and telemedicine links as well as on-line modules enabling didactic elements of the curriculum to be taught at a distance from COM-P.

### **Curriculum Year 4**

Fourth year currently includes a required clerkship in emergency medicine. Where that clinical opportunity exists, students may be required to complete a rural EM rotation. Electives offer an excellent opportunity to gain experiences in subspecialty medicine unavailable in the rural setting. Electives also enable students to acquire additional rural experience. COD participants

choose electives that they and their mentor believe would benefit them most in rural practice but must ultimately be approved by the Associate Dean for Student Affairs.

### **Additional Dimensions of RHPP Experience**

COD participants attend quarterly evening “Rural Health Huddles” -- gatherings of faculty mentors and students from all four years in an effort to build community and commitment to rural health issues.

With projected worsening rural physician shortages, RHPP recognizes the importance of greater inter-professional collaboration. Where possible, NAU PA, UArizona Pharmacy, and UArizona Nursing students enrolled in RHPP programs within their colleges are invited to didactic, clinical and social components of the COM-P program.

AHEC Scholars Program is an interprofessional curriculum offered at the level of Arizona Board of Regents to health sciences students from UArizona, ASU, and NAU in medicine, pharmacy, nursing, and public health. COM-P Rural COD students are eligible to apply to this curriculum that requires 80 hours of interprofessional team assessment of rural community needs, an intervention, and finally, an assessment of the impact of the community. Findings are submitted for publication.

Student-specific needs may be met through modification of the Rural COD requirements. Requested personalized adjustments to the RHPP curriculum must be approved by the RHPP director, Associate Dean of Students, and (where appropriate) relevant clerkship directors.

Rural COD participants receive the benefit of Dean’s letter recognition when the following criteria are met by September 1st of Year 4:

1. Attendance of at least 70 % of the RHPP monthly seminar series in Years 1 and 2, and participation in 50 % of the quarterly Rural Health Huddle social events.
2. Successful completion of 19 weeks rural clinical experience including Rural PAL and clerkship rotations with grades of Pass, High Pass, or Honors in each on first attempt.
3. Rural related project: Described in detail above, can be met through a Rural SP or an equivalency project. Successful progress toward completion of a Scholarly Project on a subject of direct rural health relevance (subject to be approved by RHPP program director and Scholarly Projects Director at initiation of project in year one). A Year 3 Scholarly Project progress report signed by the SP Mentor and submitted to the RHPP office will be required proof of successful progress.
4. Successful completion of a required four-page single-spaced reflection paper due at the end of Year 3.
5. A passing grade on all Pre-clerkship Blocks and Courses. Failure in any block, or course or receipt of two or more Level 1 ratings in behavioral competencies in Pre-clerkship years will render students ineligible for the Rural COD. Students may, however, choose to continue pursuing Rural COD program requirements.

6. Absence of Honor Code or Code of Conduct violations. Rural COD students are ambassadors of COM-P in rural communities. They are expected to conduct themselves at a high professional standard.

Rural Health Distinction Track is noted on the student's transcript when the criteria listed above are successfully met and the Scholarly Project is successfully completed per the requirements of that program.

### **Future Directions**

1. In April 2020, RHPP launched a Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship (LIC) in Payson for three students. LIC promotes development of clinical skills and medical knowledge in a context of continuity with patients, medical staff, and the community. The structure provides simultaneous clinical experiences in multiple medical specialties, facilitating the rapid acquisition of core medical competencies across a broad range of content. Clinically applied medical knowledge is reinforced as students care for their assigned cohort of 20-40 patients for the duration of the course. Longer clinical placements will promote better rural practice outcomes. Plans are in development for expansion of this program to additional rural communities.
2. Fully implementing the LIC will require a few years of staged development to ensure new faculty are sufficiently oriented and trained, and high-quality student educational experiences can be assured.
3. Outcomes of Rural COD graduate practice locations are being tracked. A report will be prepared annually for the Dean including analysis of surveyed graduate data.
4. Continued involvement of Rural COD alumni as preceptors, mentors, and advisory board members of RHPP programs will build a strong foundation for further community partnerships. Faculty development, recognition, and inclusion in rural program development will continue to be the guiding philosophy of the RHPP at UArizona College of Medicine–Phoenix.