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WVU Health News



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Recovery Act money helps WVU health-professions students learn more about public health

West Virginia's medically underserved counties expected to benefit

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. – Future doctors studying at West Virginia University can augment their training with a greater understanding of public health. A two-year old program makes it easy for students who want to earn a master's degree in public health to do so with no extra commitment of money and while still graduating on time.

Now this dual-degree program is being extended to students in nursing, dentistry, physical therapy, pharmacy and doctoral-level clinical psychology at WVU. And a grant under the federal Recovery Act will enable these students to travel, pay for extra training, seek housing or be reimbursed for other expenses.

“Medical students love the program,” said Rachel Abraham, M.D. M.P.H., of the Department of Community Medicine, who created the dual degree program. “They can work on two degrees at the same time, graduating with not only clinical skills but also a thorough grounding in a discipline that will give them tools to elevate the health of entire populations.”

Three-quarters of West Virginia counties suffer from a shortage of qualified healthcare providers, according to the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Services.

“By graduating more health professionals with public-health knowledge, WVU will be helping solve long-term health problems in those areas,” said Abraham, who is director of MD/MPH Programs and Health Sciences Center Dual Degree MPH Programs for the Department of Community Medicine. “While the dollar amount of the grant is small – just more than \$5,000 – it is significant in helping the students.”

The master's of public health program will teach students to:

- Identify and gauge the health needs of populations
- Develop and evaluate initiatives to deliver healthcare
- Promote ways to monitor population health
- Become steeped in a culture of ethical practices

Five medical students -- more than the program expected – are already enrolled in the dual-degree program, and students from other health professions are expected to sign up in the spring, Abraham said.

For information about the Dual Degree Programs at Department of Community Medicine see http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/som/cmed/degree_programs/md_mph.asp.

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For More Information:

Andrea Brunais, HSC News Service, 304-293-7087

brunaisa@wvu.com

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