

ISU Family Medicine Residency Making Residency in Rexburg

REXBURG — Idaho State University's successful Family Medicine Residency program plans to expand in Rexburg, including starting a rural training track in 2019.

The ISU residency program has about seven family medicine physicians who graduate annually. The 123 family medicine physicians that graduated from ISU Family Medicine Residency now serve 120,000 Idahoans in providing them with primary care.

Considering this, Idaho ranks 49th in the country for physicians per capita, leaving many rural populations with no care. There is a crucial need for primary care physicians in the state.

"There is a need for more residency spots in Idaho where residency students can train. Site of residency is the strongest predictor of where someone will practice. With that in mind, we have come up with plans for expansion," said Dr. Bill Woodhouse, director of external relations for the ISU Family Medicine Residency.

The ISU Family Medical Clinic already has an arranged a plan for the Rexburg rural training track. Students will start residency at ISU's medical clinic in Pocatello for a year and finish off training in Rexburg for the following two years of residency.

"We need to expand the number of residents trained in Idaho, therefore increasing the number of students likely to stay in Idaho as practicing physicians to serve those rural and underserved communities," said Dr. Kelli Christensen, ISU Family Medicine Residency Program associate director and the program's rural graduation medical education director.

In order for this to occur, ISU needs to receive approval for full accreditation for the Rexburg rural track site. Christensen said they should hear back for accreditation from ACGME, Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, in May.

Once the plan is approved, ISU will start approving students in preparation and high hopes of the rural residency kicking off in 2019.

One of the biggest issues with ISU moving into their new residency plans is that ISU can't cover all of the funding. ISU has contacted the State Board of Education and the Idaho Legislature in order to receive a 30 percent funding support for its Rexburg Rural Training track.

The medicine residency program has more plans for expansion within the next 20 years by boosting residency by two seats. In addition to this, Rexburg will add another rural training track after later expansion plans.

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“Right now, we’re looking to expand to help meet the primary care workforce needs of the state and this accreditation step is an important milestone,” Force said. “We want to develop this rural residency pathway in Rexburg, and expand our base program in Pocatello.” said Rex Force, ISU vice president for Health Sciences.

Concerning expanding the base program in Pocatello, the ISU Family Medicine Residency would need to construct a new clinic space. That would include sharing a facility with the ISU Division of Health Science to develop an Eastern Idaho Psychiatry Residency with the University of Utah.

Much of this new expansion ISU plans to do in Rexburg requires funding, but ISU is determined to move forward.

“These projects require so much groundwork that if we waited for complete funding before we started, we’d never get anything done,” Woodhouse said.

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