

FSU Medical students visit Monticello

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At the end of May, the Florida State University College of Medicine invited dozens of medical students to participate in their Rural Learning Experience in Jefferson County. The goal of this event was to encourage those who were pursuing careers in medicine to consider more rural areas to practice medicine upon graduation. While big cities have the resources to offer higher pay, it comes with big city living. By showcasing not only the need in rural communities for medical practices, but also the charm and benefits to living and working outside of the hustle and bustle of big-city living, FSU's College of Medicine hopes to entice individuals to consider it as an option.

The Rural Learning Experience was made possible through the collective work of several local entities, including the Monticello/Jefferson Chamber of Commerce, the Health Department, and Emergency Management. Local businesses, churches and individuals also participated in a group effort to coordinate a day of fun, education and exploration. Everything began bright and early at the Florida Department of Health, where medical students were invited to receive a tour of the facility and speak with individuals involved with medical services as well as with the local food pantry program. The group then moved into the heart of the city, exploring everything the downtown area had to offer in the ways of entertainment, spiritual services (churches) and dining options. A tour was given of many popular tourist sights, including the local Jail Museum, the Courthouse and the Historic Monticello Opera House. Around lunchtime, the med students ventured out to Florida/Georgia Citrus for a tour of the facility, lunch catered by Tupelos Bakery & Cafe, and a panel discussion.

The panel was comprised of five guest speakers, each discussing a different topic pertaining to rural living and the importance of medical resources for people who live outside of larger city areas, as well as the appeal of rural living overall. After the discussion panel, the group dispersed to enjoy some dessert at Arctic Scoop or Mia's Bakery. Approximately 40 med students attended, returning to the FSU campus around 4:30 p.m.

The main purpose of this day of exploration and education was to give these students a feel of Monticello and Jefferson County, explain the current status of healthcare in our area and illuminate where the needs are and what those needs may be for our county.

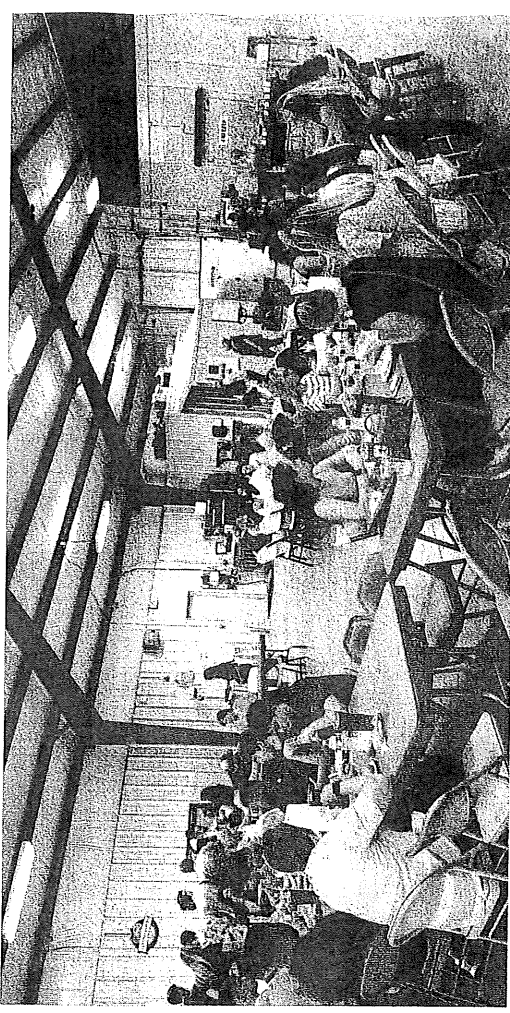
Present at FL/GA Citrus were a number of medical vendors, each giving away information and items to the students. Assisting with organizing and leading the students were several FSU College of Medicine personnel:

Allison Justice, MMS, PA-C., Assistant Professor at FSU College of Medicine; Melissa Oglesby- College of Medicine Student Affairs; Martin Shipman – Professor at FSU College of Medicine; and Emily Mueller-Nennstiel, PAS-1.

The FSU team was pleased with the response from the Jefferson community as a whole, and feels that the Rural Learning Experience made a significant impact on the students that participated.

"This event was the first in-person RuLE (Rural Learning Experience) event in several years," says Justice. "Our planning started in January, which consisted of deciding on the counties to research and visit, appointing faculty leaders for each county, and coordinating with community members. It 'took a village' to make RuLE a success. I feel that this visit was successful – Our research about Jefferson County was confirmed and enhanced through our panel and tour of Monticello. We were welcomed with open arms."

"Several of the students expressed how much they enjoyed their time in Jefferson County," added Nennstiel. "For the students who have never spent time in a rural area, this experience gives them the opportunity to picture themselves living and practicing in a place like Jefferson County. Hopefully, students feel more enlightened about the difficulties and opportunities they would have if they chose to work in



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Approximately 40 FSU medical students attended the May RuLE event, which was designed to showcase the need for medical resources in rural communities, as well as illustrate the benefits and charm to living in a rural community. FSU staff are hopeful events like this will break down barriers that prevent med students from considering practicing medicine in rural areas after graduation.

a rural area. Having no understanding of what living or working in a small community looks like is a barrier to students choosing this route, therefore we hope this experience alleviates that."

"The benefits of healthcare providers living and working in rural counties largely relates to relationships," says Justice, "which is where the most impact can be seen. We have seen that building relationships between the healthcare provider and patient can improve health outcomes. If a patient knows that the provider has the patient's best interest in mind, the patient is more likely to adhere to their recommendations. Healthcare providers that live in small communities are often well-known and are 'taken care of' by the community. Rural communities are tight-knit and look out for each other."

Although it is true that larger cities can afford larger paychecks, some of the trade offs are worth taking a slightly smaller salary, and this education event may help some of the students keep that in mind upon graduation.

"For the right provider, the sacrifice in paycheck will be more than made up in community," says Nennstiel. "If you make efforts to serve and integrate into a rural community, hopefully they will value your commitment to being there. Would you rather be the one person who could do your job in a region, or one of 200 people who could do your job in a place like a large hospital? Simply due to supply and demand, providers who serve the under-served can have a tremendous impact."

Overall, FSU staff stated that Jefferson County left a great impact of the medical students, showcasing not only the friendliness of our community, but also illustrating the peacefulness of living a slower, more rural life.

While plans are already in the works to coordinate future visits, the FSU staff expressed gratitude to Jefferson County for its cooperation. "I am thoroughly impressed with the support we had before and during our visit," stated Justice. "Organizing an event like RuLE takes effort from all parties... We want to contribute to solutions, and we believe we can accomplish this by engaging with community partners...The students, faculty and staff will be talking about this event for a while."

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