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A strategic approach to women’s health equity in rural Wisconsin

In recognition of the critical importance of this issue, the Department of Obstetrics and
Gynecology at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health (SMPH) developed a novel approach for expanding the pipeline of Ob/Gyn physicians in rural Wisconsin: it created the nation’s first Ob/Gyn Rural Residency Program. The concept of rural residency training is well established in primary care fields including family medicine; however, it is new territory for Ob/Gyn.

Working with SMPH partners in rural sites, the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology designed the residency track to recruit and train physicians who are interested in future practice in rural Wisconsin communities. The Wisconsin Rural Physician Residency Assistance Program supported the development of this novel training program. It is a logical extension of the SMPH’s Wisconsin Academy for Rural Medicine (WARM) that attracts and trains medical students who want to develop careers in rural medicine.

The Ob/Gyn rural training track is a new component of our well-established Ob/Gyn Residency Program, which is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education. Residents in the rural track receive approximately 80% of their training in Madison and spend the remaining 20% of their time at 4 rural community hospitals in Wisconsin. During the rural rotations, these residents gain valuable insight and experience in rural Ob/Gyn care. A broad evidence base has documented a strong relationship between where new residency graduates establish their practices and the geographic location of their residency training experiences. We predict that our rural training track residents will develop the skills necessary for successful practice in rural settings and will settle in rural communities after completing their training.

We believe this program, which already has drawn national attention, may serve as a model and inspire other Ob/Gyn residency programs to develop similar rural training tracks. In this way, we hope to address the growing need for more Ob/Gyn physicians in rural Wisconsin and beyond.

REFERENCES
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