

Mountain Lakes Medical Center welcomes Mercer medical student for rural clerkship experience

This spring, Mercer University School of Medicine (MUSM) medical students will be working at Mountain Lakes Medical Center as part of their rural clerkship experience, a clinical training course and essential component of their medical school curriculum. This program provides medical students with hands-on training in rural hospital settings—while supporting the school’s mission to educate physicians to meet the health care needs of rural communities in Georgia, like Rabun County.

For two weeks in February, Faith Harris, a third-year medical student on MUSM’s Macon campus, will train in the internal medicine department to get clinical experience working in a rural hospital. Harris, along with her fellow medical students, have been studying biomedical sciences and practicing their clinical skills with standardized patients for the past two years. Now in their third year, Harris and her peers are completing clerkship rotations in six core specialties—family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, general surgery and psychiatry—to gain hands-on experience.

To help strengthen the state's pipeline of rural physicians, MUSM enhanced the opportunity for students to gain exposure at a rural clinical site with the Rural Clerkship Experience (RCE). This two-week requirement will increase to four weeks for the class of 2028. The rural clinical sites include 17 medical centers across rural Georgia, part of a growing network of Mercer’s rural healthcare partners—including Mountain Lakes Medical Center.

Harris is from Effingham County Georgia and is most looking forward to seeing first-hand the community impact of medical professionals at Mountain Lakes and the relationships that have been built between patients and their physicians.

“This is great opportunity to practice developing cultural competency and recognizing social determinants of health,” said Harris. “It’s beneficial for us as medical students to learn how to appreciate the communities’ unique healthcare needs and dynamics in order to help give them appropriate care.”

By providing valuable mentorship between students and experienced rural physicians, Mercer is giving medical students high-quality clinical exposure while showcasing the diverse opportunities for physicians in rural settings.

"Mercer has always been focused on the education of well-educated rural physicians for Georgia," said Jean Sumner, M.D., FACP. "This new program will allow them to experience additional high-quality care being provided by excellent community responsive physicians.

Students will also be able to strengthen their professional network helping them know there will be other physicians and colleagues when they return to their chosen rural community."

Read more about rural clerkship rotations at Mercer: <https://den.mercer.edu/mercero-medical-students-get-unique-hands-on-training-in-rural-medicine/>

Mountain Lakes Medical Center's partnership with MUSM began in 2024, when they joined its Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center's KidsABC, a project to help rural hospitals get equipped for pediatric emergency care. <https://den.mercer.edu/kidsabc-celebrates-mountain-lakes-medical-centers-emergency-department-as-part-of-the-pediatric-emergency-care-project/>

About Mountain Lakes Medical Center

Mountain Lakes Medical Center is an innovative hospital that reaches throughout northeast Georgia and the surrounding states. We represent a bold step into a new era of how we care for those in our community, family, and beyond. Providing a unique, healing environment that embraces collaborative and person-centered care. Our fully trained professional medical staff and employees are dedicated to improving healthcare and changing the way people think about their health and wellness in our local community. The doctors, nurses, and staff here at Mountain Lakes Medical Center help to ensure our patients receive the highest quality, most compassionate, and exceptional care possible. We are a full-service, acute care, 25-bed, level 4 trauma center with over 150 employees, 15 physicians, and healthcare providers.

About Mercer University School of Medicine (Macon, Savannah, Columbus and Valdosta)

Mercer University's School of Medicine was established in 1982 to educate physicians and health professionals to meet the primary care and health care needs of rural and medically underserved areas of Georgia. Today, more than 60% of graduates currently practice in the state of Georgia, and of those, more than 80% are practicing in rural or medically underserved areas of Georgia. Mercer medical students benefit from a problem-based medical education program that provides early patient care experiences. Such an academic environment fosters the early development of clinical problem-solving and instills in each student an awareness of the place of the basic medical sciences in medical practice. The School opened additional four-year M.D. campuses in Savannah in 2008 and in Columbus in 2021, and a clinical campus in Valdosta in 2024. Following their second year, students participate in core clinical clerkships at the School's primary teaching hospitals: Atrium Health Navicent The Medical Center and Piedmont Macon Medical

Center in Macon; Memorial Health University Medical Center in Savannah; Piedmont Columbus Regional Hospital and St. Francis Hospital in Columbus; and SGMC Health in Valdosta. The School also offers master's degrees in preclinical sciences and family therapy and Ph.Ds. in biomedical sciences and rural health sciences.