

For immediate release

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“Sleep over” aims to attract students to health careers

If living together for three weeks in a college dorm, attending medical school lectures and working in labs and clinics isn't enough to attract Colorado Rural Health Scholars to health professions in underserved areas, program sponsors hope a night together on a gym floor in Wray might work.

On Thursday, June 18, the 20 high school juniors and seniors who make up the current class of rural scholars will travel from the University of Colorado Denver School of Medicine to Wray for a “sleep over.” The students will eat dinner with the town's half-dozen health care providers and learn why it's cool to practice health care in a rural area.

Then, the students will head for the Wray Rehabilitation and Activities Center – the WRAC – where they'll hunker down for the night in sleeping bags on a gymnasium floor.

The experience is designed “to get these kids excited about practicing in their communities,” said Kelly Brown, a second year medical student who helps direct the rural health scholars program. “They get a great experience in the city, but the program's mission is to reduce the health care shortage in rural Colorado. So we said, ‘Why not give them a real rural health care experience to show them what it's like.’”

Besides dining with Wray's small, but dedicated medical community, the students will shadow them through a day of business on Friday, June 19.

“Attending the program has taught me that I can achieve greatness in the medical field no matter where I go and that I can truly make a difference in the world,” said Kayla Gray, a scholar from Stratton High School.

“The city and the country are extremely different. Coming from a rural town, it is fun to experience city life and all of the different opportunities that are there. Even though the city has great opportunities, I would like to go back home and practice because I prefer a smaller setting and getting to know people in a small town. Also, I realize the need for health care professionals in small, rural towns,” explained Taylor Johnson, a junior from Prairie High and a current rural health scholar.

Amanda Braun, a scholar from Simla, commented that “the city is a great place to go hang out and enjoy the many things you can do but the country is a place where you can go relax. Kids will want to go practice medicine where they came from because at the end of the day those are the people you really care about.”

The Colorado Rural Health Scholars Program is now in its 17th year. Each spring, students from around the state compete for one of the 20 available spaces in the three-week program, which is paid for by donations and by the School of Medicine. Many local restaurants, such as Tocabe, Big Hoss BBQ, Jimmy John's Subs, Red Robin, Romano's Macaroni Grill, The Yak and Yeti, Rass Dashen, The Egg and I, Vincenza's Italian Deli, The Smiling Moose, Noodles and Co., La Costa Mexican Restaurant, Alamos Verdes in Arvada, Fruityland Smoothies of Aurora, Anthony's Pizza and Pasta, Kokoro, Mustard's Last Stand, The Bookstore Brew, Einstein's Bagels, Great Harvest Bread Company, Starbuck's, Panda Express, and the Palm Restaurant provided meals for this year's class.

During the camp, the students participate in labs and attend lectures provided by medical school professors. Two days a week students shadow a variety of health professionals at University of Colorado Hospital and Denver Health, and during the evenings they are exposed to advocacy and leadership curriculum organized by the medical students. Being a "summer camp" many fun activities are programmed as well; such as a day at Elitch Gardens, a Rockies game, a trip to the Denver Zoo, a tour of the Denver Art Museum and hikes in the local foothills.

Ryan Stahl and Taylor Cunningham, seniors at Pagosa Springs High School, reflected on the experience: "The activities we have performed have increased our ability to communicate with others, and have helped us to understand our responsibility in both the world and in our home towns."

Members of the media who would like to cover the Wray "sleep over" may contact Kelly Brown at 303-921-1906 or kelly.brown@ucdenver.edu.

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