

# touchstone

The magazine of the Mountain Area Health Education Center

MAHEC  
Inaugural Issue





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Patient Care Provided at:

MAHEC Dental Health Center

MAHEC Family Health Center

MAHEC Family Health Center at Big Ivy

MAHEC Family Health Center at Cane Creek

MAHEC Ob/Gyn Specialists

Hendersonville Family Health Center

Deerfield Retirement Community

Givens Estates

MAHEC's mission is to train the next generation of healthcare professionals for Western North Carolina through quality healthcare, innovative education and best practice models that can be replicated nationally.

We value:  
 Excellence,  
 Innovation,  
 Compassion, and  
 Collaboration.

## From Our CEO, Dr. Jeff Heck



At MAHEC we are passionate about excellence in healthcare. For 38 years we have provided high quality, compassionate healthcare as a foundation for training top physicians and health professionals. Our impact in the region is significant:

- 100,000 patients annually receive family, ob-gyn, or dental healthcare.
- \$4.8 million provided in safety net healthcare for low-income people last year.
- 377 medical and dental residents have graduated from MAHEC.
- 62% of our family medicine graduates stay in WNC to become family physicians.
- 23,000+ healthcare professionals received continuing education at MAHEC last year.

Behind all of our achievements is a person, a family, a physician, or a healthcare professional. We are proud of our quantitative results, but we are driven and inspired by the people of MAHEC – patients who find reassurance from our nurses and physicians, faculty who dedicate their careers to mentoring the next generation of doctors, and graduates who stay in WNC to become outstanding physicians, dentists and community leaders. I hope you will enjoy reading this inaugural issue of *touchstone* to learn more about the people who inspire us.

Jeffery E. Heck, MD  
 President and CEO  
 Associate Dean, Asheville Campus  
 UNC School of Medicine  
 Professor, UNC-Chapel Hill



# MAHEC Delivers Miracles for Moms

*K*at and John wanted a baby, but with three traumatic miscarriages they had nearly given up hope. Kat was referred to MAHEC's Dr. Jennifer Warren and on the day of her first prenatal visit Kat thought she was having another miscarriage. John told her to go to MAHEC instead of the emergency room.

"It was nerve wracking and I was terrified to death. I thought I was miscarrying, but she [Dr. Warren] told me it was okay," Kat said. "She is the first one who took the time to talk with me. She was always patient and understanding. Dr. Warren helped me get through and everyone can't believe I did it."

Last year, MAHEC staff and residents delivered 1,676 babies, representing 44% of all deliveries at Mission Hospital. MAHEC provided \$3.2 million in safety net care for low-income women in just one year, helping to ensure that every pregnant woman has quality healthcare regardless of her insurance status. Our Ob-Gyn care team includes physicians, nurse-midwives, and nurse practitioners who provide full obstetrical and gynecological care, including: infertility services, prenatal care, delivery and postpartum care, perinatal consultation, and high-risk pregnancy evaluation.

MAHEC is proud to have the only Maternal Fetal Medicine (MFM) specialists west of Charlotte and together with our Ob-Gyn providers, MAHEC is a valuable resource for women's healthcare in the region. High risk pregnancies represent unique challenges and the passion of our women's health team is to give superior medical care and support to every woman during her pregnancy.

Pregnancies are considered "at-risk" or face "complications" for a variety of reasons. Women may have heart disease, chronic hypertension, diabetes, kidney and gastrointestinal diseases, or infectious diseases. Otherwise healthy women may need diagnostic or therapeutic procedures such as comprehensive ultrasound or genetic amniocentesis. Whatever the reason, MAHEC's maternal health team seeks to decrease risk for preterm labor, premature birth, or growth abnormalities of the fetus.

Access to early and consistent prenatal care is critical to improving maternal and fetal health. Preterm birth is one of the leading causes of infant mortality in North Carolina. For babies who survive early delivery, half of all pediatric neuro-developmental problems can be attributed to preterm birth.

Our women's health team is highly qualified as clinicians and extremely dedicated to the women they serve. Carol Coulson, MD and Director of Maternal Fetal Medicine at MAHEC explains, "We've seen most of the medical complications that come through our door. It is the intersection of medicine with



MAHEC's Dr. Jennifer Warren, a Maternal Fetal Medicine Specialist, holds baby Tristan.

the nuances of families, their circumstances, the human element where we face the challenges and can offer a gift."

The gift of medical expertise delivered with utmost care and compassion is an important value at MAHEC and highly praised by our patients.

"It is really special to be able to go to a doctor like that," said John. "They know how to explain things. They are caring. We're really glad to go where they show so much care, because it's special to us to have this baby. The care there is extraordinary."

For Kat and John (pictured on the cover), Baby Tristan, born a healthy 6 pounds 9 ounces, is certainly a gift from Dr. Warren and MAHEC.

*"Without her, we wouldn't have this baby," said Kat. "She gave me my miracle baby."*

# The Family Medicine Residency: Meeting Needs for Primary Care

Our goal in the MAHEC Family Medicine Residency Program is to develop competent and compassionate physicians who can practice medicine anywhere in the world, particularly in small town America. Training and recruiting top family physicians for Western North Carolina is critical as our region faces an estimated shortage of 140 primary care physicians. Twenty percent of the US population lives in rural communities, yet only 9% of our nation's physicians practice in rural settings, like Western North Carolina. Graduates from rural residency programs are, however, three times more likely to practice in rural areas than urban residency program graduates.<sup>1</sup>

Blake Fagan, MD, our Family Medicine Residency Program Director explains, "Family doctors are what America needs. We specialize in primary care for children, pregnant women, adults, the elderly, the healthy, and the sick. As faculty at MAHEC, we are very committed to the highest quality healthcare; to helping the underserved; and to teaching residents and students. Our residents understand the mission to serve and, as graduates, they are living it in our region."

The delivery of high quality healthcare is the foundation of residency training. MAHEC physicians bring the resources of a large university medical center to the education of residents and to patients. As faculty appointed by UNC Chapel Hill School of Medicine, MAHEC physicians stay on the cutting edge of medicine and are active in their profession as state and national leaders. Our team is dedicated as teachers and as mentors who model best clinical practices, pass on a culture of service, and inspire the next generation of family doctors.

Faculty Josh Gettinger, MD, describes his motivations, "Thirty-three years of small town medicine have left me with some firm convictions. I can't imagine a more satisfying life than primary care, and I believe integrated and holistic care is the best care. America needs to be a healthier place for our kids to grow up, and we in family medicine can make a difference; and they are all our kids. I came to MAHEC because of my sense of a shared idealism with the staff and the residents."

With a national reputation for excellence, MAHEC attracts the best and the brightest residents from across the country. This year, more than 300 fourth-year medical students from U.S. medical schools applied for one of the nine Family Medicine residency positions at the Asheville MAHEC practice. The program is firmly grounded in the highest quality education and a strong commitment to meet the healthcare needs of the poor and marginalized in our community. In addition to providing care at the MAHEC Family Health Center, MAHEC faculty and residents provide care for patients at ABCCM, at a methadone clinic, and through Project Access. In addition, this year they provided over 100 free physicals to students hoping to participate in the Special Olympics.

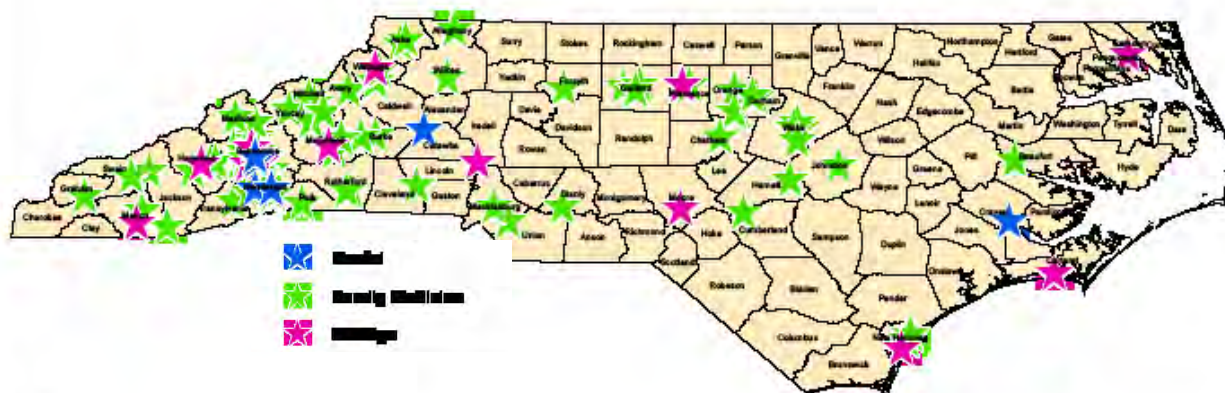
The Family Medicine Residency Program in Asheville has graduated 257 residents in 38 years and all MAHEC residencies combined have graduated 377 medical providers. This includes residency training programs in Dentistry, Family Medicine – Asheville, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Family Medicine – Hendersonville, and Fellowship Training Programs in Geriatric Medicine and Hospice and Palliative Medicine.

While nationally, residency programs only retain 46% of graduates within their state<sup>2</sup>, MAHEC has successfully retained 62% of our Family Medicine graduates to practice in WNC. MAHEC residencies are a critical training and recruitment tool to help meet the need for primary care physicians in our region. Our graduates become local providers of choice, and have changed the face of healthcare throughout WNC as your family doctor.

<sup>1</sup>Family Medicine Spokane Rural Training Track: 24 years of rural-based graduate medical education. Maudlin RK. Newkirk GR. *Family Medicine*. 42(10):723-8, 2010 Nov-Dec

<sup>2</sup>The American Medical Association, 2011 *State Physician Workforce Data Book*. Nov 2011.

## Locations of MAHEC Graduates in North Carolina





## Family Medicine Resident Spotlight



**Liza Young, MD**

During college, I became interested in medicine by volunteering at an HIV/AIDS nursing home. I was fascinated by the ways in which the disease affected the patients' physical, mental, emotional, and social well being. I have carried this interest in caring for a community with me throughout medical school and residency. That is how I became involved with the project at local methadone clinics. I've really enjoyed being able to get out of the MAHEC clinic and be more involved with the community. Meeting the women at the methadone clinic has been invaluable. We were planning to provide women with contraception, but we quickly realized there was so much more we could provide. Now we are helping them access basic women's healthcare, like pap smears and mammograms, that they otherwise might not get. I think it's incredibly valuable, as we train to provide full spectrum medical care, to know the community and understand its needs.



**Yu Kwan Chan, MD**

This is the place to be if you want to gain not just medical knowledge, but also valuable life experience. In choosing my training program, I wanted a place teeming with scientific minds and confident, yet humble and loving attitudes that I can be influenced by. I have certainly found such people in this place that I have grown to love and enjoy. I have started a 'Walk With a Doc' effort to meet patients outside the walls of clinical healthcare. The goal is to use the outdoor environment as a gateway to conversations about health, while participating in a low-impact exercise program. My vision is to share time with patients without the confines of the office environment to walk and talk about managing chronic disease, smoking cessation, or weight loss.

# MAHEC Graduates: The Foundation of Healthcare in Madison County

The MAHEC vision to train highly competent physicians for WNC is embodied in Madison County where six of the seven family physicians are graduates of MAHEC. The Hot Springs Health Program (HSHP) has become the first line of medical care for most Madison County residents, and this achievement has been fueled by the high standard of excellence in clinical care and a long term commitment from MAHEC graduates.

From Dr. Chipper Jones, class of 1979, to Dr. Will Dameron, class of 2012, MAHEC graduates anchor four busy medical centers located in Hot Springs, Laurel, Marshall, and Mars Hill. Later in 2013 Susan McDowell, a current MAHEC resident, will become the seventh MAHEC graduate at the HSHP. "Healthcare would look very different here if MAHEC did not exist," explained CEO Robert Ford, "and the caliber of the MAHEC doctors has just been spectacular."

HSHP is the sole medical provider in Madison County. Most medical practices are physician led, but the HSHP is a not-for-profit organization and the Board of Directors are Madison County residents. From its inception in 1971, there was a unique vision for community-based care, integrated with and responsive to local needs and the culture of patients. A walk through the Mashburn Clinic gives testimony to community ownership with plaques honoring gifts received from local churches and individuals, photographs of Madison County elders, and a community room.

Initially a nurse practitioner or physician's assistant provided care, and a circuit riding physician came a few days of the week. At one point, rotating physicians were even flown into our western hinterland from Chapel Hill. The challenges of retaining doctors and establishing a physician permanency started to change with the hiring of Dr. Chipper Jones in 1979. Chipper not only accepted the role of physician, he moved into the county and started planting Christmas trees on his Shelton Laurel property, a welcome sign of long-term vision. The pipeline for physicians trained at MAHEC continued as the practice grew to meet the healthcare needs in Madison County.

Dr. Jason Cook joined the HSHP after graduating from MAHEC in 2010. "I am fortunate to have a full-time clinical practice in Mars Hill and serve as a community faculty member teaching family medicine residents. Now every third-year resident spends a two-week rural rotation with me, and the feedback from residents, patients, and staff has been superb. Not only do the residents see a wide variety of patients with chronic disease, but the acute care experience is second to none - with lacerations, fractures, and critical care stabilization being a daily occurrence here. This exciting relationship between HSHP and MAHEC has brought two new family physicians to Madison County in the last two years, and that number will continue to grow along with the needs of our community."



Hot Springs Health Program  
Mashburn Clinic





Dr. Kim Nichols Heiselman

Today, HSHP has over 40,000 annual medical visits, and with nine physicians and 130 people on staff, it is also an important employer in the county. Clinics have an onsite minor trauma room, not typical for primary care offices, and patients benefit from onsite pharmacists who fill prescriptions and talk with patients right at their doctor's office. The focus is on establishing strong patient relationships, and parents who were once pediatric patients now bring their own children to see their hometown family doctor.

With over 40 years of growth and a foundation of trust and respect, HSHP is expanding once again. A building project in Mars Hill will add needed clinical space and prepare the program for continued excellence well into the next decade. The healthcare future for Madison County residents looks better than ever thanks to community vision and a strong pool of family medicine graduates from MAHEC.

## Hot Springs Health Program

- **A non-profit established in 1971**
- **Clinics in Hot Springs, Laurel, Marshall, and Mars Hill**
- **MAHEC graduates employed at HSHP:**
  - Dr. Jason Cook**, class of 2010
  - Dr. Marianna Daly**, class of 1988
  - Dr. Will Dameron**, class of 2012
  - Dr. Kim Nichols Heiselman**, class of 1995
  - Dr. F.B. "Chipper" Jones**, class of 1979
  - Dr. Kristi Schleder**, class of 1989

The image shows a large, modern building with a prominent gabled roof and large glass windows, illuminated from within. The building is set against a backdrop of misty, rolling mountains under a soft, twilight sky. The overall mood is serene and professional.

*Touching lives in* Western North Carolina  
*and beyond*

MAHEC Biltmore Campus

Your Doctor. Your Teacher. Your Advocate.