

touchstone

THE MAGAZINE OF MOUNTAIN AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTER

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New Growth Addresses
WNC's Oldest Health Challenges



From our CEO, Dr. Jeff Heck

MAHEC's mission, true for the last 44 years, is to improve health in Western North Carolina, and the organization has grown to meet the need. Part of providing the best, most innovative care we can includes collaborating with other organizations to make this possible.

It is through working together, sharing resources and expertise, and striving toward the same goals that true innovation takes form. We all are better as a team than we are working alone. We have taken this to heart in many of our recent collaborations, especially the UNC Health Sciences at MAHEC initiative and all that it incorporates.

From this new initiative to our Simulation Center to the new Master of Public Health program (and even a new look to our logo), I invite you to read more about these growing programs - and new ways of solving old problems - inside.

As an academic research center, we aim to stay abreast of the latest technology and research methods in order to provide you with the best care, always.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffery E. Heck". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Jeffery E. Heck, MD
CEO, MAHEC
University of North Carolina Health Sciences at MAHEC
Associate Dean, UNC School of Medicine Asheville Campus



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Patient Care Provided at:

MAHEC Dental Health Center
and Center for Advanced Training

MAHEC Family Health Center at Biltmore

MAHEC Family Health Center at Cane Creek

MAHEC Family Health Center at Enka/Candler

MAHEC Family Health Center at Lake Lure

MAHEC Family Health Center at Newbridge

MAHEC Family Health Center at Swannanoa

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,
Collaboration.*

To remove your name from the mail list or
update your address, call 828-257-4442,
email michelle.morgan@mahec.net, or mail the
enclosed envelope with your request.

New Look -

SAME GREAT CARE

In service to our mission, MAHEC's programs and services have grown significantly since the organization began 44 years ago, nearly doubling in size over the last four years. With as much as we have grown, and the new programs in place, it seemed an appropriate time to update the MAHEC logo.

This updated logo represents growth with a new, fresh look, yet also stability in our mountain region. Just as the organization has endured, we will continue to provide compassionate healthcare for many years to come.



With recent state appropriations, we have been able to expand a number of existing programs and launch new ones designed to transform rural healthcare across the region. These initiatives form the backbone of UNC Health Sciences at MAHEC, a unique interdisciplinary partnership with the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill School of Medicine, Eshelman School of Pharmacy, and Gillings School of Global Public Health as well as UNC Asheville, Western Carolina University, and regional community partners.

To help house some of these initiatives, a fourth building has been constructed on our Biltmore Campus. This new building – scheduled to be complete in Spring 2019 – will include classrooms, an interprofessional learning café, and incubator spaces to bring together disciplines from across the region. It will also house our new Psychiatry Residency and psychiatry outpatient care, as well as the interdisciplinary programs that are the foundation of UNC Health Sciences at MAHEC, including the UNC School of Medicine Asheville Campus and the UNC Gillings School's Master of Public Health Program in Asheville.



Creating Public Health Leaders

The Gillings School's MPH Program in Asheville

We knew that there was a need and a desire for higher education in our region focused on public health leadership - we just didn't realize how much! The UNC Gillings School's Master of Public Health (MPH) Program in Asheville officially began this August with an enrollment that well exceeded the program's goal of 10 students for the first year.

Fifteen applicants were accepted into the MPH program, including three of MAHEC's public health summer interns who are UNC Asheville graduates. This new, two-year master's degree program is designed for working professionals to learn

how to transform health across the region. The MPH program, led by the nation's top-ranked *public* school of public health, is well-positioned to address our region's unique rural health needs with a project-based curriculum that places students in WNC communities to develop, analyze, and implement interventions where they are needed most.

48 full enrollment expected in 2022

"I feel inexplicably drawn to improving the lives of others and watching communities grow into the best and most enduring versions of themselves."

- Kol Gold-Leighton, former intern and student of the UNC Gillings School's MPH Program in Asheville

FILLING THE GAP

Psychiatry and General Surgery Residencies Address Critical Shortages in WNC

PSYCHIATRY RESIDENCY

The Psychiatry Residency will move into the new UNC Health Sciences at MAHEC building upon completion and continue to train psychiatrists who can collaborate and consult with primary care physicians. These physicians are often the only doctors available to provide mental healthcare in underserved rural areas.

"The only way we are going to solve our bigger, system-wide challenges is to work collaboratively with primary care physicians to expand mental health resources."

- Thomas Campbell, MD, second-year psychiatry resident at MAHEC

MAHEC's partnership with hospitals, treatment centers, and medical practices throughout the region provides residents with a wide variety of experiences working with adults, adolescents, and children in inpatient and outpatient settings, treatment centers, and rural primary care practices across WNC, where mental health support is needed most.

GENERAL SURGERY RESIDENCY

The shortage of healthcare providers in WNC extends to general surgeons as well. In fact, one in three counties in WNC is without a practicing general surgeon, the type of surgeon most needed in rural areas.

"One of the reasons I applied to the MAHEC residency is because it focuses on underserved communities. I'm sold on staying here," says Harold Campbell, MD, third-year general surgery resident.

The residency began in 2017 with the first eight residents, expanded by five in 2018, and expects a total of 25 by 2020. General surgery residents, along with all other residents and medical students, practice surgery and other simulated care in the new MAHEC Simulation Center.

IMPACT OF ADDING 1 GENERAL SURGEON TO A COMMUNITY¹:

26

local jobs

\$1.4

million in wages

\$2.7

million in revenue

Psychiatry residency program faculty
Olgiard Pucilowski, MD, with PGY2
Resident Thomas Campbell, MD.

1. Eilrich FC, Sprague JC, Whitacre B, et al; National Center for Rural Health Works. (2010). Economic impact of a rural general surgeon and model for forecasting need. Available from <http://digitalprairie.ok.gov/cdm/ref/collection/stgovpub/id/24192>.

REAL-LIFE PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Using Simulation for Hands-on Practice of Clinical Skills

Although there was no one in sight, the scream coming from the wooded trail could be heard all the way from the parking lot.

Luckily, it caught the attention of a group of third-year family medicine residents who had gathered by the nature trail behind MAHEC.

With only a moment's hesitation, the group ran into the woods to find a hiker sprawled face down at the bottom of the embankment. His eyes were closed tight against the pain, and he was clutching his leg above two puncture wounds. His backpack, a sleeping pad, and hiking poles lay nearby, scattered during his apparent fall.

The doctor squatted down next to the hiker to ask what had happened.

"A snake. I've been bitten by a snake," the man moaned repeatedly.

The team of six residents worked quickly to fashion a litter using rope and the victim's sleeping pad and then immobilized his neck with a SAM splint one of them kept in his hiking gear. They worked together to carry him up the trail to the parking lot, where they paused to discuss next steps.

The conversation was cut short when the victim, Will McLean, MD, suddenly got up and was joined by Susan Alexander, MD, and Benjamin Gilmer, MD, who designed the wilderness medicine simulation in which the residents had just participated.

Being able to create these real-life scenarios is what makes simulation education such an integral part of MAHEC's Family Medicine Residency curriculum.

The residents agreed that these simulations helped make their classroom learning memorable and forced them to think quickly on their feet.

1,735

learners from 15 WNC counties trained in the Simulation Center in 2017

"Simulation has the potential to be one of the best teaching tools in resident education," Dr. Alexander explains. "It allows for residents to hone skills via hands-on learning in a stress-free environment, to work in teams with their peers, and to share observations about the scenarios in real-time with each other under the guidance of their faculty."

Residents participate in simulation activities like this wilderness medicine training one to two times per month, often in MAHEC's new state-of-the-art Simulation Center.

The immersive nature of simulated learning is what makes it such a powerful learning tool, according to Elaine Alexander, RN, MSN, Simulation Center director.

Our simulation technology is so sophisticated and life-like that learners can almost forget the scenarios are not real.

"Our simulation technology is so sophisticated and life-like that learners can almost forget the scenarios are not real," Alexander shares. "You get an opportunity to put your skills into practice. But you can make mistakes in a simulation, learn from them, and no one will get hurt."

The new 15,000-square-foot Simulation Center was completed in May 2018 and has operating, trauma, and labor and delivery rooms that simulate real-life hospital scenarios with high-fidelity manikins, task trainers, and laproscopic surgery, endoscopy/bronchoscopy, ultrasound, and virtual reality simulators.



'It's What's Inside That Counts'

Building Updates at MAHEC Ob/Gyn Specialists
Make Patient Care More Personable and Efficient



Upstairs waiting area at MAHEC Ob/Gyn Specialists

That saying rings true for so many things - our Ob/Gyn Specialists' building included. If you've been by recently, you probably noticed all the construction taking place. Although it is an image boost for sure, it's not all about looks. It's really about taking care of our most precious asset - you.

Our patients are what matter most and their comfort, ease of check-in, and safe places to share and receive care are our priority. The upstairs lobby is complete with new, comfortable seating and soft paint colors, and our main entrance will soon be complete with a round check in/out counter directly in the middle, increasing patient interaction and level of care.

In addition, we now have more exam rooms and two new Centering Pregnancy rooms for group prenatal care. They're inviting, warm places for expecting mothers to not only receive exceptional care but also share tips and ideas with each other and make friendships that can last a lifetime.

Project CARA (Care that Advocates Respect/Resiliency/Recovery for All) is also included in the renovations. This program provides trauma-informed, substance use treatment and perinatal care in one comprehensive program, and now has a new "patient living room." The design provides a setting that is less clinic-like for clients to engage with additional services, group support, and serves as an additional waiting area.

"As a trauma-informed clinic, creating an environment that promotes trust and safety can help clients feel more comfortable discussing what is going on in their lives," says Melinda Ramage, FNP-BC, clinical director of Project CARA. "This also provides an opportunity to engage with other clients that have a shared experience."

All renovations taking place at MAHEC Ob/Gyn Specialists are expected to be complete and the dust settled by the end of the year.

"Having a substance use disorder can often be met with stigma and shame from society, and having a place that is welcoming can change isolation to community."

**- Melinda Ramage, FNP-BC,
clinical director of Project CARA**



Project CARA Patient Living Room

Something to Smile About

Multi-Partner Collaboration Will Bring More Dental Providers to Polk County

'This will be the only program of its kind in the area. We're grateful to have such amazing partners working with us to make this a reality.'

How do you make lasting changes that benefit entire communities? You partner with organizations that care just as much about improving healthcare in our region.

"Access to dental care is a growing problem in Western North Carolina, and one that directly relates to problems with access across the state," says Natalie Raper, MHS, dental rural program development and practice administrator for the MAHEC Dental Health Center at Columbus.

That's why MAHEC recently purchased the former Hospice of the Carolina Foothills Columbus office building adjacent to St. Luke's Hospital in Polk County and will open a new rural dental teaching practice in this location.

The practice will be staffed by general practitioners, dental residents, and eventually dental students from UNC School of Dentistry. Isothermal Community College in Rutherford County will create a new dental assistant degree program, and the practice site will include classroom/lab space for these students. MAHEC will work with the students to provide most of their clinical training. In addition, Foothills Medical Associates primary care group practice will also be housed in the building through a lease with St. Luke's

Hospital. This arrangement will provide additional rural training opportunities for primary care residents and other learners.

"Lack of access to care causes people to delay minor dental procedures, which can turn into major dental problems presenting to hospitals," says Natalie.

This new collaboration will increase healthcare access for the residents in Polk and Rutherford counties. MAHEC's goal is to help train future dentists, dental assistants, and other healthcare professionals who will be able to provide dental and primary care in rural communities throughout Western North Carolina. A public signing among the entities involved will take place at the new site on November 26th. The renovation of the building is expected to start in December with an anticipated completion by late Spring 2019.

"This will be the only program of its kind in the area," says Ed Coryell, DDS, director, division of dentistry and general practice residency program at MAHEC. "We're grateful to have such amazing partners working with us to make this a reality. Dental care affects the whole patient's health, and we know this collaboration will have a positive impact on the area."



Left to right: Dr. Jeff Heck, CEO, MAHEC; Walter Dalton, President, Isothermal Community College; Dolly Horton, Vice President of Academic and Student Services, Isothermal Community College; Dr. Ed Coryell, director, division of dentistry and general practice residency program, MAHEC; Jim Bross, CEO, St. Luke's Hospital

MAHEC's ECHO is Being Heard Around Western North Carolina

Virtual training removes barriers to quality healthcare in rural communities



A NEW WAY TO LEARN - Project ECHO® (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) is an innovative virtual learning model connecting UNC Health Sciences at MAHEC's medical experts with rural providers to share knowledge so they can effectively treat chronic and complex health conditions. This approach brings healthcare training to the places where it is needed most.

"I love this teaching and learning model," shares Susan Alexander, MD, a MAHEC family physician and medical director for the virtual trainings. "As a rural physician, I never liked the isolation I felt in webinars. Project ECHO® is different. It brings together colleagues who are dedicated to serving our WNC communities. Because this model emphasizes sharing knowledge, the learning flows in all directions."

In each Project ECHO® session, MAHEC's medical and behavioral health experts share specialized knowledge with providers across WNC, but the experts also learn from providers' first-hand experiences. Participants help each other and build a supportive community as they discover best practices.

In rural healthcare, access is everything

MAHEC is one of only three academic health centers in the state to use this innovative training to support rural communities where geographic and socioeconomic barriers can make access to specialty care difficult if not impossible.

Trainings focus on health conditions that can be harder to treat in rural areas including Type II diabetes, epilepsy, COPD, Hepatitis C, substance use disorders, and other complex health conditions.

MAHEC has an ambitious vision for this telementoring training model: to make healthcare expertise and best practice care available to save and improve lives throughout WNC.

"Project ECHO® allows us to share what we have learned with providers and their patients across the region," says Lourdes Lorenz-Miller, RN, MSN, MAHEC's Project ECHO® program coordinator. "This is what makes this model so exciting. It has the potential to address pain and other health challenges in a big way by reaching more people."



Expanding the impact by making an ECHO