

NEW DOCTOR IN YANCEY/MITCHELL

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Dr. Jessica White shares her passion for rural medicine with patients at the Celo Health Center in Yancey County and also patients in Spruce Pine and Bakersville in Mitchell County.

Yancey—Jessica White, MD, begins a yearlong Rural Family Medicine Fellowship through MAHEC on September 4, 2017 as she joins the Mountain Community Health Partnership. She will be seeing patients mainly at Celo Health Center but also at Bakersville Community Health Center sites in Spruce Pine and Bakersville.

White did not start out on a path to medicine, but a career in photojournalism put her in direct contact with a rural population with needs that were not being met. Although there was value in telling their stories, she felt there was more she could do to better their situation.

“I wanted to do something that was more directly of service to the community, and it just seemed like rural medicine was a good fit,” says White.

A career change led her to medical school in Tennessee with a rural primary care tract. Knowing the huge need for primary care doctors in rural Appalachia, White knew exactly what she wanted to do through medical school. Ultimately, she went to MAHEC to complete her Family Medicine Residency because of the training she knew she would receive.

“I feel like I already had a strong background in rural medicine, but the residency program at MAHEC was going to give me the most comprehensive training,” says White. “When you’re out in the rural community, not only do you not have immediate access to specialty care, or even things like imaging that you have here, but you also have patients who just frankly will not go into the city to get anything done. So you have to be able to do it, and I feel like MAHEC has done a really good job of preparing me for that ability.”

Thanks to North Carolina state appropriation funding, MAHEC has expanded its Rural Health Initiative and is able to provide White’s fellowship, as well as others at Cherokee, Highlands/Cashiers, and two Maternal Child Health Fellowships in Haywood County.

“The fellowships give these new physicians additional training in rural medicine and a continued connection to the MAHEC residency so they don’t feel like they’re completely out on their own,” says Dr. Benjamin Gilmer, their Fellowship Advisor. “During this year, Dr. White will continue to develop specialized skills to better serve her community and empower her to be a leader in her practice.”

White says she’s excited to see her goal of practicing family medicine in rural Appalachia finally came to fruition, and is looking forward to getting to know the community and its residents, who welcomed her with a picnic on Sunday hosted by Dr. David Larson and Susan Larson of Spruce Pine that was co-sponsored by MAHEC and the Yancey-Mitchell Rural Medical Society.

“I like getting to know people in different ways – not just as a patient but as a person,” says White. “I think this is going to be a really good fit for me, and I think there’s going to be a lot of opportunity to focus on things I’m interested in, and the rural fellowship is going to help me with that.”

For more information about MAHEC’s Rural Health Initiative, please visit www.mahec.net/RHI.

MAHEC was established in 1974 and is a leader in healthcare, education and innovation. Located in Asheville, MAHEC serves a 16-county region in Western North Carolina. It is the largest Area Health Education Center in North Carolina, which evolved to address national and state concerns with the supply, retention and quality of health professionals. 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. For more information on MAHEC, visit www.mahec.net.