

THE MAGAZINE OF MOUNTAIN AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTER

touchstone

FALL 2014



MAHEC celebrated four decades of excellence in healthcare and education on Sept. 13 at our 40th Anniversary Celebration held outside on our Biltmore Campus.



Hendersonville Family Medicine program residents Dr. Vivi Sachs and Dr. Brian Kaderli; Hendersonville faculty Dr. Evan Beasley and Dr. Andrew Morris; and the program's director, Dr. Geoffrey Jones



Family Medicine program founders Dr. Harry Summerlin and Dr. Dick Walton



Asheville Family Medicine Residency Director Dr. Blake Fagan and graduate Dr. Robert Kline

From our President and CEO, Dr. Jeff Heck

MAHEC currently has 70 residents and fellows in training, and 36 medical students who are part of the Asheville Campus of the UNC School of Medicine. Not only do we attract the best and brightest residents and students from across the nation, physicians in WNC have supported our role as a medical teaching center and provided superior learning experiences.

We employ 60 faculty physicians as part of our residencies and fellowships and, in addition, over 500 physicians support our training programs as "community faculty," preceptors and mentors. We count on this extensive faculty network as dedicated teachers and mentors who model best clinical practices, pass on a culture of service, and inspire the next generation of physicians, dentists, and pharmacists.

We could not offer the resources of a large university medical center to Western North Carolina without a partnership with local physicians and hospitals. We hope you enjoy reading about a few physicians and graduates who are committed to training the next generation of healthcare leaders for WNC and beyond.



Jeffery E. Heck, MD
President and CEO, MAHEC
Professor, UNC Chapel Hill

To remove your name from the mail list or update your address, call 828-257-4410, email tina.owen@mahec.net, or mail the enclosed envelope with your request.

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MAHEC is a medical teaching center



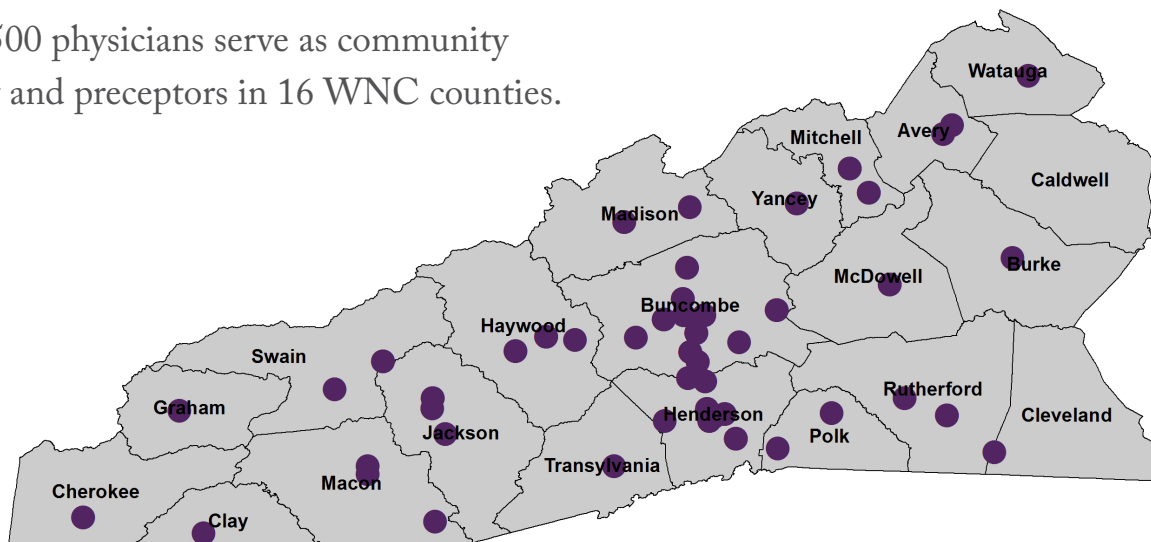
MAHEC is at the forefront of medical recruitment and training for Western North Carolina, giving students of all levels — from high school to college, from medical school to residency and fellowships — the tools they need to excel.

This would not be possible without hundreds of physicians and healthcare professionals, at MAHEC and across the region, who give their time and expertise in their respective fields to help us in our mission. Not only do community faculty offer exemplary instruction in a range of specialties, but they also provide support and guidance to students finding their calling in medicine, encouraging these healthcare leaders of tomorrow to serve the same WNC communities that were so instrumental in their early success.

“I feel like MAHEC trained me very well to be able to meet the needs of a small community in a small, rural hospital, and to be able to help set a high standard and meet that bar.”

—Elizabeth England, MD, Class of 2014, Mission Women’s Care, Ob-gyn serving Macon, Jackson and Swain counties

Over 500 physicians serve as community faculty and preceptors in 16 WNC counties.



Celebrating our faculty



"When deciding on an advanced training program after dental school, I was immediately drawn to MAHEC. I was attracted to the program's focus on comprehensive general dentistry, the welcoming environment, and the location in the beautiful city of Asheville. . . . I am grateful to now be back at MAHEC as a faculty member."

—Jessica Oliver, DDS, Class of 2012, MAHEC dental faculty

Suzanne Dixon, MD, ob-gyn faculty:

'We are committed to serving women with the most need'



Suzanne Dixon, MD, spent nine years in private practice before she returned to academic medicine with a broadened perspective. "The close relationships our faculty has with residents and students has been a career shaper for me," Dr. Dixon says.

She is currently serving as a generalist ob-gyn faculty member and as Medical Director of MAHEC Ob/Gyn Specialists. Having gone from rounds as a visiting UNC medical student to now doing the teaching, she appreciates working side by side with residents as she watches them develop skills and grow professionally. "They've exceeded my expectations," Dr. Dixon says. "By

the time they're in their fourth year, it's like working with colleagues."

Dr. Dixon credits MAHEC's success in training the next generation of doctors with its mission of meeting the needs of the community, no matter how complex or difficult.

"Our faculty is really committed to serving the women with the most need, and those patients are often the most complex. Our resident teaching program is improved because of that commitment," Dr. Dixon says. "We have a very approachable and dedicated faculty. . . . I'm honored and excited to be a part of it."

This year, MAHEC's
community faculty

will help mentor and train:

- 70 residents and fellows at MAHEC
- 18 UNC Eshelman Pharmacy School students
- 36 UNC School of Medicine Asheville Campus students
- 5 Kenan Primary Care Medical Scholars
- 200 graduate students in clinical rotations
- 13 undergraduate interns
- 7 minority high school interns



Randall Johnson, MD:

'We need well-qualified, engaged physicians in all specialties'

Randall Johnson, MD, set down the knife when he retired from a 30-year career as a general surgeon in Asheville, but he still has an impact on patients. They benefit from the students he teaches in his continued role as the Course Director for Surgery Clerkship for the Asheville Campus of the UNC School of Medicine.

"I see it as an opportunity to specifically help students understand surgical problems and complexity, even if they don't become surgeons," Dr. Johnson says.

The role of surgeon didn't come easily to Dr. Johnson at first. When faced with the choice between doing research or practicing medicine, he was torn. He discovered his surgical skills as a medical student while doing research experiments on spinal cord regeneration in rats. Later, a rotation through surgery left its mark on Dr. Johnson when he realized how rewarding it felt taking care of the patients. "The rest is history," he says.

Dr. Johnson became the first surgeon in North Carolina to complete a laparoscopic cholecystectomy (a technique using small punctures to remove a gallbladder), which was the birth of minimally invasive surgery. This led to partnerships in both teaching a course on laparoscopic surgery and several published papers.

However, it's important to Dr. Johnson not to focus solely on the surgical side of things when educating students. He knows there's more to being a surgeon than just technique. He shows students how to approach patients, understand patients' perspectives, and develop empathy. "I think we need well-qualified, engaged physicians in all specialties," Dr. Johnson says. "I want their experience to be helpful to them regardless of the final choice of specialty."



Ben Stepp, MD

Swain Medical Center
in rural Bryson City

"My teaching role has involved hosting health professional students from many different schools in the region. I feel fortunate to have learned from so many expert teachers and am grateful for these opportunities to give back to my profession. ... It is especially gratifying to be involved with the Kenan Primary Care Medical Scholars Program. I hope that I can inspire some of the students and get them excited to come practice in rural areas in Western North Carolina."

Dr. Stepp came to WNC every year of medical school for a clinical rotation through MAHEC, and this past summer, he trained a student in our Kenan Primary Care Medical Scholars Program. The program allows UNC Chapel Hill School of Medicine students to pursue their interest in rural medicine by shadowing rural physicians for six-week periods.

Celebrating our family medicine graduates



As president of the North Carolina Society of Family Physicians in 2013, Dr. Dowler (far left) spent time at the nation's capital

Shannon Dowler, MD, Class of 2002

A leader in primary care in WNC

Since she was young, Shannon Dowler, MD, has loved the mountains. This admiration has taken her from childhood summers spent vacationing in Asheville, to her collegiate years in Boone, NC, to an esteemed career as a primary care advocate and healthcare leader in the region. “I always had the vision,” Dr. Dowler says. “My husband and I were always very clear that we’d end up in the mountains of North Carolina.”

Though she was raised in nearby Greensboro, Dr. Dowler enjoyed visiting – so much so that after attending Appalachian State University and continuing on to medical school in Greenville, NC, she sought to return to the mountains to complete her medical training. “When you’re interviewing at different programs, you just have this gestalt – the feeling of what is the right fit for you – and we felt that automatically at MAHEC,” Dr. Dowler says. “The Asheville program just had a very strong culture of quality improvement, and I think was early in the adoption of evidence-based medicine.

“At MAHEC, Dr. Suzanne Landis was an important mentor for

me. ... I really liked her independent streak – her unwillingness to conform but to do what she thought was right.”

Since graduating in 2002, Dr. Dowler has taken this model and run with it – not just providing exemplary care as a family medicine physician, but also by advocating for a better healthcare landscape. Dr. Dowler has served in various roles on the North Carolina Society of Family Physicians board since 2003, and today she serves as Chief Medical Officer at Blue Ridge Community Health Services in Hendersonville as it grows to meet the region’s rural healthcare needs while functioning as a training site for Hendersonville’s MAHEC family medicine residents.

“Everyone’s thrilled to have the residency be part of Blue Ridge,” Dr. Dowler says. “I was so excited when the teaching health center opportunity came up, because I do think it’s really important for us to expose young doctors to community health, because I think it’s going to help influence them to choose practices that serve vulnerable populations.”

Innovative practice a hub for MAHEC grads

In addition to being the largest independent, physician-owned family practice in North Carolina, Asheville's The Family Health Centers also boasts another feat: today, eleven MAHEC graduates work at one of its three sites across the region.

So what makes the organization so attractive to our graduates? Like MAHEC, The Family Health Centers was founded four decades ago at the start of a burgeoning movement toward primary care, and since then, the clinic has been early to adopt new technologies, including electronic health records. Also, many labs and x-rays are processed on site, and the center offers nutritional counseling.

Its doctors have served as Chief of Staff at Mission Hospitals and in Mission Health Leadership, and also continue to give back as community faculty — teaching residents, medical students and other ancillary staff.

"Patients really like what we do here and are really happy with the quality of care we provide," says MAHEC graduate James McMillan, MD, who has been with the organization for three decades. "I think the biggest achievement that we have here is patient satisfaction. . . . We aren't talking down to the patient or telling the patient what to do, but we're saying, 'Here's what needs to be done, and let's see if we can both agree to do it.'"

Its staff practices preventative, evidence-based medicine, and physicians at The Family Health Centers channel their personal passions and special interests into their care. MAHEC graduate Alan Baumgarten, MD, MPH, who has been with the organization for decades, credits his time as a nutritionist as central to his work as a family doctor. "I still do a lot of nutritional medicine in my practice now," he says. "I was attracted to primary care through its impact on the daily lives of people, its broader scope, and looking at the whole person."

The Family Health Centers expanded from its first location in downtown Asheville in 1995 to two more locations in Arden and Hominy Valley.

MAHEC Graduates at The Family Health Centers

Rustan Adcock, MD, Class of 2006
Alan Baumgarten, MD, MPH, Class of 1986
Richard (Rick) Burris, MD, Class of 1988
Wendy Coin, MD, Class of 1993
Jason Cook, MD, Class of 2010
Laura Dressel, MD, Class of 2006
Cameron Kurowski, MD, Class of 1998
James McMillan, MD, Class of 1980
Paul Midkiff, MD, Class of 2007
Holly Musgrove, MD, Class of 1998
Lisa C. Scott, MD, Class of 2012



Dr. Keel with wife Temia on a winter cross country ski trip into Yellowstone National Park this past winter

Joseph Keel, MD Class of 2000

Dedicated to rural medicine at Yellowstone

Nestled in the heart of Yellowstone National Park amid grazing elk herds and pristine mountain views is Mammoth Clinic, the only year-round clinic in more than 3,400 miles of wilderness. It also is where you can find MAHEC graduate Joseph Keel, MD, who calls the park and its surrounding community home as he continues a career dedicated to practicing and teaching primary care in a rural setting.

Dr. Keel graduated from Asheville's Family Medicine Residency program in 2000. "I was well trained and well supported by the faculty and the nurses at MAHEC because of their philosophy and approach to medicine," he says.

Afterwards, he worked at The Crow Indian Reservation in Montana for four years, before joining the Montana Family Medicine Residency faculty. While there, he translated his passion for rural care into a successful effort to establish a wilderness medicine tract. "I worked with our residency program and the Wilderness Medicine Society to create that program," Dr. Keel says. "It can integrate outdoor experiences, rescue, treating some in the field. . . . It's about being able to handle issues in the field when you're hours away even from an EMS transport."

Although Dr. Keel has since left the faculty to work exclusively at Mammoth, he still supervises doctors in training during the summers, teaching them valuable skills while reinforcing the importance of primary care in a rural setting.

"You never stop learning — by being a teacher you learn."—Joseph Keel, MD

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