



## NEWS RELEASE

**Media Contact:** Jennifer Maurer  
External Communications Manager  
[Jennifer.maurer@mahec.net](mailto:Jennifer.maurer@mahec.net)  
828-257-4445

### **Mountain Area Health Education Center CEO Announces Retirement**

*Board Initiates Executive Search to Advance MAHEC's Mission and Continued Growth*

Asheville, NC, August 17, 2021— After nine and a half years leading the Mountain Area Health Education Center (MAHEC), Jeffery Heck, MD, has announced plans to retire as CEO of the Asheville-based academic health center and safety net provider. MAHEC is the largest nonprofit in Western North Carolina (WNC) and one of nine area health education centers dedicated to improving health across the state. MAHEC's clinical practices support approximately 200,000 patient visits per year and are fully accredited through the American Association of Ambulatory Health Centers, consistently receiving the highest quality ratings under Medicare, Medicaid, and commercial payers.

Heck first joined MAHEC in 2004 to chair the Department of Family Medicine and support the establishment of a branch campus of the UNC School of Medicine, which has grown since 2009 from four to 35 third-year medical students and an increasing number of fourth-year students. As MAHEC's president and CEO since 2012, Heck led the organization through a threefold expansion, increasing the nonprofit's annual operating budget from \$30 to \$100 million and the number of employees from 300 to more than 900. He guided the expansion of MAHEC's graduate medical education programs to include surgery, psychiatry, rural medicine, addiction medicine, and internal medicine residency and fellowship programs in addition to family medicine, ob/gyn, dentistry, and pharmacotherapy programs. Within the next five years, MAHEC will train more than 300 residents and fellows annually in partnership with HCA Mission Hospital and other WNC hospital systems.

Working with North Carolina's General Assembly and university leadership, Heck oversaw the establishment of UNC Health Sciences at MAHEC, an academic health center with programs affiliated with UNC's top-ranked schools of public health, dentistry, pharmacy, and medicine. UNC Health Sciences at MAHEC focuses on addressing North Carolina's most pressing health needs—including the COVID-19 pandemic, opioid crisis, maternal and rural health disparities, and workforce shortages—with robust programming from high school through college, professional school, and continuing education. MAHEC learners participate in interprofessional, rural, and community-based training and simulation education in MAHEC's state-of-the-art center, which will soon be WNC's only fully accredited simulation center and one of the few in the Southeast.

During Heck's tenure, MAHEC expanded its regional impact by recruiting and training learners in every Western North Carolina county, most of them rural and underserved, including 20 rural fellows over the past four years. These physicians remain engaged with the academic health center after their fellowship by training a steady pipeline of MAHEC learners, some serving as faculty at rural teaching practices established in partnership with local healthcare systems. MAHEC's sustained commitment to improving rural health through academic medicine has established the nonprofit as a national rural health leader.

Although he is stepping down from his leadership role, Heck will continue to see geriatric patients at Deerfield Retirement Community, ending his career as he began it: caring for patients. It is a career that has inspired countless others including medical students volunteering in underserved Honduran communities through the not-for-profit he founded, Shoulder to Shoulder; colleagues at the World

**Mountain Area Health Education Center**

121 Hendersonville Road • Asheville, NC 28803 • Phone (828) 257-4400 • [www.mahec.net](http://www.mahec.net)

Health Organization; and students and faculty at the University of Cincinnati School of Medicine, where he focused on global health for 19 years prior to joining MAHEC.

MAHEC's board of directors remains committed to the organization's mission and is actively searching for a chief executive who can guide the organization's strategic growth, identify opportunities in the midst of challenges, and lead healthcare transformation at all levels.

Visit [www.mahec.net/ceosearch](http://www.mahec.net/ceosearch) to learn more.

###

**Mountain Area Health Education Center** was established in 1974 and is a leader in healthcare, education, and innovation. With a main campus in Asheville, MAHEC serves a 16-county region in Western North Carolina and is one of nine [Area Health Education Centers](#) in North Carolina. MAHEC's mission is to recruit, train and retain the workforce needed to create a healthy North Carolina with a focus on primary care in rural communities and those with less access to resources. MAHEC offers residency training in family medicine, ob/gyn, general surgery, psychiatry, pharmacy, and dentistry as well as fellowship training in addiction medicine, sports medicine, hospice and palliative care, and rural medicine. MAHEC's Asheville campus is also home to [UNC Health Sciences at MAHEC](#), an academic health center in partnership with UNC-Chapel Hill that includes programs from the UNC School of Medicine, UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, UNC Eshelman School of Pharmacy, and UNC Adams School of Dentistry. For more information, visit [www.mahec.net](http://www.mahec.net).