

UW-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health: Nation's first and only rural Ob-Gyn residency program expands

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Madison, Wis. –The nation's only rural Ob-Gyn residency program is expanding. Starting October 7, Western Wisconsin Health in Baldwin, Wisconsin will join the rural rotation as a part of the UW Ob-Gyn rural-residency program.

Faced with a nationwide shortage of obstetricians and gynecologists, especially in rural areas, the department of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health started the nation's first rural residency in 2016. The program is designed to train and provide care to women in rural Wisconsin.

Residency is medical training in which newly graduated doctors practice medicine under supervision of an attending physician. The Ob-Gyn residency program lasts four years.

In the UW program, residents' training is split between sites in Madison and rotations with rural-site partners throughout the state. Those rural-site partners are in Portage, Waupun and Monroe and now, Western Wisconsin Health in Baldwin. In each Ob-Gyn residency class, six residents practice in Madison and one additional resident is on the rural track. Rural residents complete a single rural rotation in their first and fourth years of their training and two one-month rural rotations in their second and third year of their training. There are currently three residents in the program, and the first rural resident is set to graduate in 2021.

Dr. Alexa Lowry (class of 2022) will have a three-week rotation in Baldwin starting October 7 and going through October 26. Dr. Lowry was born and raised in rural Cumberland, Wisconsin.

In Wisconsin, 27 of 72 counties have no obstetrician-gynecologist. This scarcity of providers disproportionately affects women in rural communities. Fewer than half of rural women live within a 30-minute drive to a hospital with perinatal services in Wisconsin, and over 10 percent have a drive of 100 miles or more.

“Since our mandate is to increase the Ob-Gyn workforce in rural Wisconsin, we are excited about the partnership with Western Wisconsin Health. The mission, vision and goals of the UW Rural Ob-Gyn residency program and their organization are perfectly aligned,” said Dr. Ryan Spencer, director of the UW Ob-Gyn residency programs. “I am so grateful to everyone we have met with in Baldwin from their administration to the clinical staff. I believe this expansion of our training program is going to benefit the women of Wisconsin for years to come.”

“We are proud and excited to be a part this progressive program that will help to ensure access to excellent care for women in rural areas for generations to come,” said Alison Page, CEO at Western Wisconsin Health.

According to the American College of Nurse-Midwives, nearly half the counties in the U.S. lack an obstetrician/ gynecologist. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists estimates there will be between 6,000 and 8,800 fewer Ob-Gyns than needed in the United States by the year 2020 and a shortage of possibly 22,000 by the year 2050.

There have been more than 400 applicants for this rural Ob-Gyn residency program in three years.