Pharmacy Residency Increases Education Opportunities

NEW PROGRAM ACCEPTS TWO POSTGRADUATE PHARMACY RESIDENTS EACH YEAR WHO ARE INTERESTED IN SPECIALIZING IN HOSPITAL CARE

When the best and brightest leave to pursue additional training, odds are they may never come back. Salina Regional Health Center initiated a new residency program for pharmacy graduates in 2012 to help attract and retain pharmacists who might one day enter practice in Salina or other parts of the state.

Today, many pharmacy graduates pursue postgraduate training to gain specialized skills. Some jobs require this additional training.

"One year of residency is often considered equivalent to three to five years of practice experience," says Steven Blanner, PharmD, BCPS, Salina Regional's pharmacy residency director.

Last year 31.5 percent of applicants for residency positions nationwide did not match with a program because not enough positions were available. Salina is one of eight Kansas hospitals to offer a postgraduate pharmacy training program.

A WELL-ROUNDED EXPERIENCE

Salina Regional's program accepts two residents a year for one year of training. Residents gain a wide range of skills in general hospital practice, internal medicine, critical care, postsurgical care, trauma/emergency medicine, practice management, ambulatory care and medication safety. The program also allows the flexibility to customize training to meet residents' interests by developing electives as needs arise.

"To be an accredited residency program, there are core standards required by the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists," Blanner says. "In this first year, we've developed electives in nephrology, advanced critical care, hospital quality initiatives and behavioral health."

Salina Regional's size as a rural regional referral hospital has advantages. Most hospital-based residency programs are associated with large health systems in urban areas.

(Above right) Pharmacy residency director Steven Blanner welcomed the program's first class of residents, Kalie Heideman and Chris Zielenski (left) in 2012.

"This is a small enough facility that you get to know the people you're working with," says Kalie Heideman, pharmacy resident. "The wide array of patients who come through Salina gives a balanced and comprehensive exposure to what hospital-based pharmacy practice is all about. I feel the program has prepared me to be a successful pharmacist at any institution I apply for."

Heideman, who is originally from Arizona, is strongly considering employment in Kansas after residency.

"The people I've met have made me consider staying," Heideman says. "It was interesting for me to see real snow. I found I liked this new season I had never experienced before."

RESEARCH MAKES AN IMPACT

Residents are required to perform research as part of their training. Heideman took on a project that implemented the use of medication education groups for inpatient behavioral health patients. The project shows promise in reducing the number of repeat emergency department visits for psychiatric patients.

Pharmacy resident Chris Zielenski looked for ways to help reduce the number of hospital readmissions for patients with congestive heart failure (CHF). His efforts helped implement a process where follow-up phone calls are given to CHF patients to assess their compliance with medication usage after they've returned home from the hospital. During the call, pharmacists answer questions and work to resolve any issues that may be present. Patients with symptoms indicating they are getting worse are referred to their primary care physicians before conditions decline to the point of needing to be readmitted to the hospital. In a limited sample of patients who received the follow-up phone call after discharge, none was readmitted for CHF.

"Other hospitals and care facilities in the region are looking at our model to see if they can implement it," Zielenski says. "Doctors at Salina Regional are requesting the protocol for their patients upon discharge. That's the greatest compliment in my eyes."