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1-29-2016

### **Gardner-Webb Physician Assistant (PA) Students Receive Grants for Service, Leadership Development**

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# Gardner-Webb Physician Assistant (PA) Students Receive Grants for Service, Leadership Development

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Office of University  
Communications

January 29, 2016

## *Homeless Clinic Developed by Students Furthers Mission of PA Studies Program*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Launched to help meet the healthcare needs of an underserved rural population, the Gardner-Webb University Physician Assistant (PA) Studies Program has been recognized for its students' leadership and service in the community.

The N.C. Academy of Physician Assistants (NCAPA) presented the PA program a \$2,000 Joyce Nichols Community-Based Project grant that will be used to support a screening clinic for homeless patrons served by the Greater Cleveland County Baptist Association in Shelby, N.C. The clinic was established through the time and efforts of the PA students under the supervision of Assistant Professor Dr. Nancy Winker and Assistant Professor Ashley Kernicky, PA-C, MPAS, and continued by the Student Government Association (SGA).

"The mission statement and focus of the PA Studies Program is to promote primary care in medically underserved communities," Winker noted. "These students saw a need and are trying to fulfill it by serving homeless men and getting them access to care."

The PA Class of 2017 president, Christen MacKorell, wrote the grant request, because her fellow students desire to do more to help the homeless population.

"Our goal as a program is to eventually progress to a full-functioning, student clinic," MacKorell explained. "The funds from the Joyce Nichols Community-Based Project Grant provided us with the opportunity to provide more resources, additional services, and as a result—better patient outcomes. We chose this profession out of a desire to give patients a better quality of life. I do not see any reason we should wait until after graduation to pursue this passion. Now is always the right time to help those who are in need."

With the supplementary funding, homeless patrons will receive influenza vaccinations, blood pressure screenings, dermatological screenings, foot care, blood glucose screenings, hair care, toiletries, and have access to a laptop to search for jobs, apply for food stamps, or reach out to other resources. The PA students are also developing a resource guide listing additional medical and housing resources in the community.

PA student Morgan Warthan ('17) helps to coordinate the clinics with churches in the area. "This is a small way that we are trying to give back to our community and hope our efforts continue as new classes come through," she explained. "While we are students and are not licensed to diagnose or treat illnesses, we can detect the possibility of diagnoses and refer patients to the community centers that do provide care. We hope one day local healthcare offices—from pharmacies, dental offices, and medical offices—can collaborate with us to achieve adequate healthcare for all who reside in Cleveland County."

The NCAPA also recognized four students by awarding \$1,000 from the Lanny Parker Memorial Fund for leadership development opportunities. The original grant request for \$500 was earmarked to partially fund two of four students attending the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA) Leadership and Advocacy Summit Feb. 3-6 in Washington, DC. NCAPA decided to double the request because officials were impressed with the students' submission and also wanted to commend Gardner-Webb for supporting four students to attend the summit.

During the AAPA summit, MacKorell has been invited to speak as a member of a panel discussion entitled "Developing and Engaging Student and Early Career PA Leaders." MacKorell was selected in part because of her extensive volunteer experience, her advocacy role for medically underserved communities and her leadership qualities. She is also the first PA student to be accepted into the North Carolina Medical Society's Leadership College through the Kanof Institute for Physician Leadership.

Based in the University's new College of Health Sciences facility, the PA program enrolled its third class in January 2016. The full-time program is 28 months in length with 16 months of didactic instruction followed by 12 months of clinical rotations in hospitals, clinics and private practices throughout the Southeast. The didactic curriculum uses a traditional classroom setting augmented with hands-on skills training and real-world patient problems solved in a team-based learning environment. Clinical rotation sites include family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, women's health, emergency medicine, general surgery, mental health, and one elective. In addition, students rotate through an underserved U.S. community.

Pending graduation of its first class, the GWU program, one of only 199 PA programs in the U.S., received provisional accreditation status in September 2013 from the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA).

*Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University's purpose is to advance the Kingdom of God through Christian higher education by preparing graduates for professional and personal success, instilling in them a deep commitment to service and leadership, and equipping them for well-rounded lives of lasting impact, Pro Deo et Humanitate (For God and Humanity).*