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## Philanthropy boosts efforts to address physician shortage on Eastern Shore

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Rural-MD Scholars program students and faculty visit Smith Island on Maryland's Eastern Shore during summer. COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

The University of Maryland School of Medicine is expanding an initiative aimed at addressing the physician shortage on Maryland's Eastern Shore, backed by more than \$4 million in new philanthropic support.

The medical school's Rural-MD Scholars Program recently received a \$2.4 million endowment from the Philip A. Zaffere Foundation, along with \$1 million gifts from the Clark Foundation and University of Maryland Memorial Hospital Foundation, which supports the mission of Shore Regional Health.

These contributions, along with the generous support of other donors, continue to strengthen and sustain the program's impact in providing student scholarships and expanding the rural healthcare workforce.

The Rural-MD Scholars program provides full-tuition scholarships and specialized training to medical students who commit to practicing for at least four years in an Eastern Shore healthcare setting after residency.

School leaders say the donations will help reduce financial barriers for students interested in rural medicine while strengthening the long-term pipeline of physicians serving the Shore.

“With four counties on the Eastern Shore among the top five in Maryland for infant and child mortality, we must continue to address the crucial need to expand the physician workforce in our rural communities,” said Dean Mark T. Gladwin, who is also the vice president for medical affairs at the University of Maryland, Baltimore. “We are so grateful for the generous support of our donors as we continue to grow our Rural-MD Program.”

The Philip A. Zaffere Foundation — named for the late Philip Zaffere, an Eastern Shore entrepreneur and food production engineer — has long supported efforts to improve healthcare in the region along with the UM Memorial Health Foundation.

The Clark Foundation has also played a longstanding role in strengthening Maryland communities by supporting initiatives that expand access to health services and education.

There are currently 12 medical school students at University of Maryland School of Medicine who are part of the Rural-MD Scholars program. Many of these students have personal ties to the Eastern Shore and the desire to practice in the communities where they grew up.

Program leaders say their long-term goal is to support 10 Rural-MD Scholars each year with full in-state tuition scholarships, building a steady pipeline of physicians dedicated to the region.

“I hope to use my knowledge of the community to better connect with patients and form trusting relationships that will empower them as they navigate the healthcare system,” said Sarah MacDonald, a Rural-MD Scholar from Salisbury.

This year, the inaugural cohort of three students will complete family medicine, internal medicine and general surgery clinical rotations in local Eastern Shore healthcare settings including UM Shore Regional Health and Tidal Health, marking a transition from classroom-based learning to hands-on patient care in the region.

“Rural healthcare is a unique and essential part of the healthcare continuum, requiring a broad skill set to meet the needs of the community,” said Ken Kozel, president of UM Shore Regional Health. “We are proud to mentor and train the future providers of care on the Eastern Shore and ensure that our community continues to have access to highly skilled, compassionate care givers.”

The effort comes as the Eastern Shore faces some of Maryland’s most significant healthcare gaps. Nearly the entire region is federally designated as medically underserved, and residents in some communities must travel long distances for routine care.

Caroline County, for example, has only one primary care provider for every 2,500 residents, compared with about one for every 1,000 residents in more urban areas such as Baltimore County.

“These shortages have real consequences for patients and families like complications from chronic conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure,” said Leah Millstein, Rural-MD program director and associate professor of medicine. “Our goal is to train physicians who understand these communities and are committed to serving them long-term.”

Program leaders say they plan to continue growing the initiative through new partnerships with local organizations and expanded training opportunities. The program will welcome its third cohort of Rural-MD Scholars in July during a summer orientation program on the Eastern Shore.

For more about the Rural-MD program, visit [www.medschool.umaryland.edu/ome/curriculum/rural-md-scholars](http://www.medschool.umaryland.edu/ome/curriculum/rural-md-scholars).