



Residency Grads Calling Fayetteville Home

:: by Bill Kirby

For as long as he can remember, Alex Byrd, DO, has dreamed of becoming a physician. Today, he is living his dream.

Dr. Byrd, 29, is a graduate of the 2021 Medical Residency Program at Cape Fear Valley Health, in association with Campbell University's Jerry M. Wallace School of Osteopathic Medicine.

The Medical Residency Program began in 2017, offering hands-on training for students in emergency medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, general surgery, internal medicine and recently added psychiatry.

"The entire thought process behind the physician residency program is to build a first-class physician workforce," says Mike Nagowski, Chief Executive Officer for Cape Fear Valley Health. "In addition to helping address the national shortage of physicians, we expect to be able to retain many of our graduates to provide care for the southeastern region of North Carolina. Additionally, the creation of our teaching programs has become a significant recruitment bonus for physicians and other professionals who are interested in working in an academic environment."

"So far, so good," says Don Maharty, DO, Vice President of Medical Education for Cape Fear Valley Health.

"About half of all our graduates choose to stay in the health system after graduation and become part of our community," says Dr. Maharty, who is also regional associate dean of Campbell's School of Medicine. "Of the 30 graduates we've already had, a total of 15 will remain – two in OB/GYN, five in emergency medicine and eight in internal medicine. This is wonderful news for our community and its healthcare needs."

Additionally, several internal medicine residents have moved on to enroll in specialized training in fellowships – three in nephrology, one in cardiology, one in palliative medicine and one in critical care.

The Medical Residency Program will have an economic impact of 900 new jobs and bring more than \$500 million to the Cape Fear region and to southeastern North Carolina in the next decade.

"This program generates many positives for our community, positioning us as a regional leader in medical education while attracting talented young professionals to our community," says Robert Van Geons, president and



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chief executive officer for the Fayetteville Cumberland Economic Development Corp. “Like many metropolitan areas our size, it is often hard to recruit established practitioners from larger, more well-known markets. As the impressive results of this effort demonstrate, once people get a chance to see first-hand what we have to offer, they are happy to make Fayetteville and Cumberland County their home. The investment of Cape Fear Valley Health and our community into this program will yield returns for years to come.”

On January 14, 2021, Cape Fear Valley broke ground on the Medical Education & Research and Neuroscience Institute, a \$30 million state-of-the-art teaching facility spanning five stories and 120,000 square feet, replete with classrooms, lecture halls and simulation labs providing resident medical students with hands-on training. It is anticipated to open in 2022.

Dr. Alex Byrd is one who plans to practice internal medicine at Cape Fear Valley Health.

“The internal medicine residency program allowed me to experience a wide variety of illness and disease management, while also giving me the opportunity to treat a diverse community population,” Dr. Byrd says. “I made the decision to stay in Fayetteville and at Cape Fear Valley to continue the work I enjoy with providers and staff I have formed relationships with.”

“I enjoy being able to help others and form relationships with co-workers and patients alike,” says Dr. Byrd, a native of Sevierville, Tenn. “I am thankful for the opportunity to begin my professional career in a community that feels like home and that I have grown into over the past three years.”



Jessica Isaac, DO

‘I’ve Grown In Confidence’

Unlike Dr. Byrd, who always dreamed of becoming a physician, Jessica Isaac, DO, took something of a different journey toward her career in osteopathic medicine, working first as an environmental health inspector with the Kentucky Department for Public Health.



“I knew that I wanted to be more hands-on with helping people, specifically on the individual level,” says Dr. Isaac, 35, a native of Cynthiana, Ky. “I went back to school to complete a master of public health degree in health education. It was during that time that I volunteered for a free clinic and fell in love with caring for the medically underserved. I entered medical school soon after, with the intention to one day work in a community such as this, where I felt needed.”

And, hence, she found herself in the internal medicine residency program at Cape Fear Valley Health, where Dr. Isaac says she was exposed to “a vast array of pathology.”

She embraces the opportunity.

“I am very appreciative of the patient population here that has and continues to allow us to learn from them as we provide the necessary care that they need,” Dr. Isaac says. “With that, along with the mentorship of several hospitalist attendings, I’ve grown in confidence as well as in clinical knowledge.”

Dr. Isaac says she grew up in rural Kentucky, but

Fayetteville, Cumberland County and North Carolina, as well as Cape Fear Valley Health, are now her newly adopted homes.

“I love the warm weather, the proximity to the ocean and the people,” Dr. Isaac says. “Several members of my family have relocated here as well. I decided to stay at Cape Fear Valley Health to be close to family and continue to provide care to the population here that needs us so much.”



Scott Syndergaard, DO

Exceptional Training

Scott Syndergaard, DO, says he plans to practice in the community, too.

“North Carolina has rapidly become ‘home’ to me and my wife and kids,” says Dr. Syndergaard, 33, a native of Pocatello, Idaho. “We enjoy the location, the weather, as well as the many people who have had a significant influence in our lives since we moved here.”



“I am grateful for the opportunity to continue to serve this wonderful community.”

– Matt Walker, DO

He is a graduate of the emergency medicine residency program.

“The training offered at Cape Fear Valley is exceptional in a lot of ways,” Dr. Syndergaard says. “The emergency department has a very high level of acuity, or number of urgent cases. This allows for involvement in the care of many rare illnesses and conditions a resident might not see otherwise. Because we were the first class, that gave us ample opportunity to be hands-on with high levels of responsibility from the very start.

“We as emergency medicine residents were really the captain of the ship and have been able to rapidly build our skills with regards to patient care, diagnosis and treatment and procedural skills.”



Ryan Starr, DO

‘A great place to work’

Ryan Starr, DO, welcomes the opportunities presented when the emergency department at Cape Fear Valley Medical Center is busy with a high volume of patients.

“Training at Cape Fear Valley Emergency Department has prepared me to work anywhere in the world,” says Dr. Starr, 34, a native of Eagle River, Alaska. “The skills I’ve obtained will make me a very competent physician throughout my career.”

Dr. Starr embraces serving the health needs of those in this community, and he has an additional incentive for his decision – his wife, Teresa Starr, DO, who is in the last year of her residency training in general surgery.

“We chose Cape Fear Valley together,” Dr. Ryan Starr says. “It is a great place to work and continue to develop my skills while helping patients in a community that has a need for highly trained physicians.”



Matt Walker, DO

‘Every Tool And Opportunity’

Matt Walker, DO, 36, is proud and grateful to be a part of the OB/GYN residency program and wants to use his skills to teach others in the field.

“Being in the inaugural class of Cape Fear Valley’s OB/GYN residency has provided a very unique experience,” he says. “It has allowed for complete

emersion in all aspects of medical and surgical care since day one. The hospital and the graduate medical education department has made every tool and opportunity available to prepare us to transition to our roles as attending physicians.”

A native of Lynchburg, Va., Dr. Walker and his wife found here a welcoming community both like calling home.

“The decision to remain in Fayetteville was an easy one for my family,” Dr. Walker says. “My wife and I have made amazing friends that have made us feel at home. We especially enjoy family outings to the Fayetteville Woodpeckers baseball games and the Fayetteville Marksmen hockey games. I chose to stay with Cape Fear Valley Health because I enjoy teaching residents and hope to remain involved with the graduate medical education program throughout my career. I am grateful for the opportunity to continue to serve this wonderful community.”