



Catherine McCarthy is an assistant professor, director of the obstetrics fellowship and associate director of residents at the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Nevada School of Medicine. McCarthy currently heads the rural obstetrics program.

Photo by Theresa Dams-Doughlas

Like a good neighbor, the School of Medicine is there

By Ken Kempcke

Did you know that 87 percent of Nevada’s land mass is made up of rural and frontier counties? Just 11 percent of the state’s population lives in those counties. These 268,541 Nevadans must travel far to receive healthcare.

According to the *Nevada Rural and Frontier Health Data Book*, the average distance most rural Nevadans must travel to reach one of the 15 acute care hospitals in rural counties or to reach one of the closest tertiary care hospitals in Reno, Las Vegas or Salt Lake City is 114 miles.

In order to assist rural communities with health care services, the Nevada State Office of Rural Health was created by the state legislature in 1977, later evolving into The Center for Education and Health Services Outreach within the University of Nevada School of Medicine. The center’s mission has expanded to encompass the health care issues confronting medically underserved populations throughout the state, both rural and urban.

Pregnant, rural women are one such group served by the center, Dr. Catherine McCarthy, assistant professor of family and community medicine in the school of medicine, says. She operates an obstetrics clinic out of the Physician’s Clinic at the South Lyon Medical Center in Yerington. Once a month, family medicine

residents from the School of Medicine drive there to see patients.

“Currently, there are no practicing obstetricians or family physicians practicing obstetrics in that area,” McCarthy says, “Before our service began, in November 2001, many rural women chose to forgo prenatal care and would present to Carson, Fallon or Reno at the end of the pregnancy, in labor, without any prenatal care.

“Since the program began, we have provided prenatal care to approximately 200 pregnant moms in Yerington,” McCarthy notes. “Many families have seen us for more than one pregnancy, or have referred pregnant friends, family or colleagues for care at our clinic.”

Toward the end of their pregnancies, when women need to be seen more frequently, they also visit the Family Medicine Clinic on the University of Nevada, Reno campus. Each of these patients is assigned to a resident who is responsible for following the prenatal care and participating in the delivery.

“It is truly a rewarding experience for all involved,” McCarthy says.

The center’s primary programs are not only service oriented, but also include medical and continuing education as well as training opportunities.

The center is also actively involved in shaping state, regional and national policy that affects rural, frontier and urban underserved areas, and is frequently at the forefront of new and innovative programs. It assesses the impact of health care on the economies of rural counties, in collaboration with the University’s Department for Applied Economics and Statistics, and has assisted policy makers in addressing the needs for infrastructure supporting health care services.

Other diverse programs that the center has advanced recently include a proposed Family Medicine Rural Residency Training Track program in Fallon, tele-health services to assist patients of the Shriners Hospitals for Children, expansion of health services for veterans in the Elko service area and telecommunication linkages for rural tribal health centers.

“The programs of the Center for Education and Health Services Outreach reflect our partnerships with a variety of individuals, organizations and communities to meet the needs of Nevada citizens,” says Caroline Ford, assistant dean of the School of Medicine and center director. Her 24-year history with the center has provided a unique opportunity to work with several generations of people within Nevada communities, and expand the programs and services that reflect changing needs.

The center has been serving Nevada communities for more than 30 years and is a vital component of the mission of the School of Medicine and its commitment to community.

For more information on ways to support the Center for Education and Health Services Outreach, please contact Stefanie Scoppettone, director of development for the School of Medicine, at (775) 682-9143 or email scops@unr.edu.