First Medical Students Undertake Cardiology Clerkships at Eisenhower

By: Roxanne Jones

Eisenhower Medical Center recently welcomed the first three medical students (two from the Keck School of Medicine of USC and a third from Ross University School of Medicine) choosing to undertake their cardiology clerkships in the desert.

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"A cardiology clerkship introduces third- and fourth-year medical students to the clinical realm of this specialty," says Andrew Rubin, MD, Director of Cardiac Research and the Pacemaker Clinic at Eisenhower Desert Cardiology Center. "During their first two years of medical school, they take basic classes in anatomy, physiology, histology and biochemistry. In their third year, they begin clinical rotations with patients with pumping hearts."

The cardiology clerkship ranges from two to five weeks, during which the student shadows a cardiologist while he or she sees patients.

"I see approximately ten patients a day," says Cardiologist Barry Hackshaw, MD. "With the patient's permission, the medical student screens the patient before I do, to review medications and any symptoms the patient is having. Then I go in and review that data, talk to and examine the patient, and the student examines the patient. I make any final decisions about treatment, and discuss that with the student outside the patient's presence."

"We vary the students' experiences between general cardiologists like myself and specialists in interventional cardiology and electrophysiology," Dr. Hackshaw adds. "Here the students get a broad exposure to clinical cardiology in a community hospital versus an urban medical center like USC where there are more inpatients with more complex problems. Here we do more preventive care and office-based cardiology."

Keck School of Medicine student Anna Muñoz Chavira completed a four-week elective cardiology clerkship at Eisenhower from July 16 to August 10,2012."I had the opportunity to work with Drs. Hackshaw, Rubin, [Charlie W.] Shaeffer and [Philip J.] Shaver, and feel very privileged to have been able to work with such a diverse and intelligent group. Dr. Hackshaw has the gift of making patients feel right at home," she says. "When you see his interaction with them it gives you the sense that he makes patients feel well taken care of."

"Dr. Rubin works diligently and fast," Chavira continues. "He takes care of patients with potentially deadly arrhythmias, and his work requires him to be extra thorough and focused; it's hard to imagine where all his sustained energy comes from."

"Dr. Shaeffer offers his patients something extra," she notes. "After the physical exam, he brings his patients into his private office to finish the visit. I have no question that it makes his patients feel extra special.

And Dr. Shaver loves to teach," Chavira says. "He taught me about reading nuclear stress test results and shared the importance of staying abreast of the current literature, including topics that concern patients such as nutrition and sexual health after a heart attack."

"As I examine and interview patients now, I've found myself proudly using what I learned from my Eisenhower preceptors," she adds. "What I valued most is the fact that they were so enthusiastic about teaching. It was a fantastic experience." The physicians value the experience, too. "It allows us to get back to our academic roots and be a teacher in addition to a practitioner," says Dr. Rubin. "It gives us a newfound sense of energy and excitement, setting aside time to enhance a student's knowledge."

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