It's a Match! Residency Programs Fill All Positions

Eisenhower adds 22 new residents

By Victoria Pelham. The Desert Sun

RANCHO MIRAGE, March 31, 2014 — Eisenhower Medical Center in Rancho Mirage is adding 22 new medical residents for the second year of its training program.

The residents, selected through the annual National Resident Matching Program for medical school graduates, come from universities across California, Colorado, New York, Texas, Virginia and the Caribbean.

"To say the least, we're very happy with the group that has chosen to come to Eisenhower," said Roy Young, director of Eisenhower's internal medicine residency program. "I think they'll really be a positive reflection on the hospital and on the community." The valley health community is placing their hopes on residency programs like Eisenhower's to train and retain doctors for the region which struggles with a severe physician shortage, because doctors are more likely to practice in areas where they complete their training. "Just like last year, the group really posed the possibility of introducing physicians to the Coachella Valley and a percentage of them will stay," he said. "We'll do our jobs to try to populate the valley with as many primary care physicians as we can."

Doctor-to-patient ratios can be as low as one doctor per 9,000 residents in some parts of the east valley, much lower than the federal recommendation of 1 per 2,000. And some are concerned that the Affordable Care Act, which is expected to bring thousands more people into insurance coverage and preventive care, could make the shortage more pronounced.

Maureen Strohm, director of the family medicine residency, said this year's class of residents includes one graduate originally from Indio who did a geriatrics rotation at the hospital and another graduate from UC Irvine who, while in medical school, spearheaded a project in the now-defunct Duroville trailer park with Latino Health Access.

The 22 new medical residents will join the current class in June, creating a total of 38 residents.

Eisenhower's first class of 22 residents with (front row, left to right) Maureen Strohm, MD, Program Director of the Family Medicine residency program, Dr. Joseph Scherger, and Roy Young, MD Program Director for both the Internal Medicine and the Preliminary residency programs.

Damoun Rezai, 31, a current resident in the family medicine track, grew up in Southern California and said he and his classmates are all excited about practicing in the valley. He, too, hopes to stay after the program is complete. “I actually look forward to staying and making a change,” Rezai said. “Even the people when we’re in clinic, they’re very happy that we’re here,” he said. “I’ve met young patients that are super happy that they have residents that can relate with them. I’ve had old patients that are super happy because they have the new knowledge, the new ideas, new studies, a different attitude.” “It’s a good change,” he said. Rezai said the current residents are looking forward to working with and supervising their new colleagues. “Having been through the first year has really given us a good idea and created a foundation for us to grow on,” he said.

The residents follow separate tracks in family medicine, internal medicine and preliminary medicine before moving on to subspecialties in areas like dermatology and anesthesiology. Strohm said the hospital is also hoping to develop primary care-based fellowships which could include sports medicine, geriatrics, palliative care, community medicine and integrative medicine. “What it means for the hospital is you have very high-quality, very intelligent individuals providing medical care to the patients who are part of the Eisenhower health care system both in the ambulatory and inpatient units and for the community,” Young said. “It means that they can expect the usual high-quality care they get at Eisenhower and the more personalized care that residents are able to give patients because they have the liberty of spending so much more time with the individual patient.”

Eisenhower’s residency program saw an increase in nearly 25 percent of applications received for its programs, about 500 applications for family medicine and about 900 for internal medicine.

About 300 people were interviewed. It matched within the top 5 percent of its applicants, “absolutely extraordinary” for just its second year, Strohm said. “Medical students who come here have had extra experience for medical training, they become a great word-of-mouth for the local schools that participate with the match,” she said.

The residents complete rotations in emergency medicine, internal medicine wards, ICU ambulatory, gynecology, chemical dependency, surgery and inpatient and outpatient pediatrics in the first year. While in these rotations they roam the halls of Eisenhower, see patients at the hospital’s family clinic in La Quinta, shadow surgeries, volunteer at medical clinics and attend to patients and families in a wide range of health situations. Hoda Amiri, 30, is a resident on the internal medicine track. She completed medical school at the University of Tehran but came to Rancho Mirage because her husband works in Riverside and she wanted to end up close to him. She was drawn to Eisenhower because of the friendly atmosphere and supportiveness. There was no class above her when she started last June, just the new residents and attendings. “We went through the same thing,” she said. “I think we can guide them better getting used to the system here.” Amiri also plans to practice in the valley after her residency ends.

“Absolutely this is building a foundation,” Strohm said. “I think we’ll continue to progress and develop and become one of the leading centers teaching hospitals in the area for primary care.”

The UC Riverside School of Medicine has also received accreditation for its first residency program which will bring eight new residents to the valley by July 2015. That school will participate in next year’s match for the first time.

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