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New clerkship makes the most of geriatric education

By Denise Trunk

Beginning July 10, all fourth-year medical students will add a new component to their medical education – a two-week clerkship in geriatric medicine.

Coordinated by the Geriatric Clerkship Development Team and led by director John Meuleman, M.D., and Miho Bautista, M.D, in the UF Institute on Aging, the course will expose students to numerous situations in treating and communicating with geriatric patients.

Miho Bautista, a clinical associate professor in the College of Medicine’s department of aging and geriatrics, said the new program will make a substantial contribution toward improving geriatric medicine.

Rebecca Beyth, M.D., an associate professor in the College of Medicine’s department of geriatrics and aging research and associate director of the Rehabilitation Outcomes Research Center, will, as of July 1, be chief of a new division that will oversee the clerkship, the division of career development and education.

“The students are going to see patients in different clinical settings — whether it is the VA or university private practice, nursing home or Shands Hospital — to make sure they are getting exposure to everything they would see, depending on what they do in their future careers,” Beyth said. “Maybe they won’t go into geriatrics, but even if they go into internal medicine they are going to have to deal with older patients, and even if they go on to be pediatricians they are going to have to deal with the parents or grandparents of the patients they treat. So they need to have understanding.”

During the weekdays the students will make rounds, develop patient assessments, attend selected clinics and participate in interdisciplinary meetings at one of four locations. Two are in Jacksonville, at the Translational Care Unit at Shands and the River Garden Hebrew Home, and two are in Gainesville at Shands Rehab at UF and the Geriatric Evaluation Management Unit at the Malcom Randall Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Each week will end on Friday afternoon with a small group meeting with Bautista in Gainesville at the Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center at the VA. The first week’s small group will focus on falls and immobility, and the second week will focus on dementia.

Under the direction of Marco Pahor and the Institute on Aging, the team is working to help UF become a nationally recognized presence in the training of future clinicians and researchers in geriatrics and aging.

“Starting with students is a good way to develop a brand name and reputation because they’ll go up through the system and say, ‘I was trained at UF and there was the geriatric model,’” Beyth said. “The resident and the fellow — they may already be jaded about what they think about geriatrics. So we are focusing on starting with the students before their mind is made up on the subject.”

Third-year medical students will continue to encounter geriatric patients as part of their family medicine and ambulatory care clerkship.

Peggy Smith, education coordinator in the division of geriatrics and one of the course developers, said the program’s tagline of “Caring, Respect and Communication” sums up the course philosophy.

“The secondary goal of the clerkship is to teach practitioners to communicate with older patients. They are sometimes difficult to communicate with, but they need a lot of care and respect,” Smith said. “With this course we need to get all of that integrated so doctors know how to properly communicate with the patient, with the family and the interdisciplinary team.”

Dr. John Meuleman, left, Dr. Rebecca Beyth, Dr. Miho Bautista, Peggy Smith and Michelle Griffin developed the department of aging and geriatric medicine’s new mandatory two-week rotation in geriatrics. The first group of fourth-year students will attend the course beginning July 10 in four clinical sites, two in Jacksonville and two in Gainesville.