

THE RURAL PRACTICE DECISION

In choosing to participate in the Rural Practice Student Loan and Scholarship Program, you have a terrific opportunity to improve the health of rural Arkansans while lessening your financial burden of attending medical school. Please make this decision carefully, for participation in the program requires you to make a legally binding commitment for the next eleven years of your life. Ask yourself these questions as you consider your decision:

PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS

- Do I have a clear understanding of primary care?
- What experiences have I had that would lead me to commit to a primary care practice?
- Do I know enough about other specialties to feel comfortable committing to primary care?
- Are there other physicians in the area? What are their practices? Do they welcome new physicians? Are they near retirement age or will they still be there when I begin practicing?
- What is my income potential?
- What will be the make-up of my patient base?
- Is there a setting for my practice? Will I be expected to build a building or buy equipment? Can the office be staffed adequately?
- How often will I be on call?
- If there are no other physicians in the community, will arrangements be made for me to take vacation and attend continuing education conferences?
- What will a rural community expect from a physician?

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- How far is the closest movie theater? Good restaurant? Major airport?
- If I choose to affiliate with a faith community, are there desirable options?
- Are there other professionals in the community, and is this important to me?
- Can my family and I enjoy our hobbies there? Is there a golf course, tennis court, or swimming pool? Are there opportunities for soccer, hunting, fishing, community service, or whatever you like to do in your spare time?
- Is there a good bookstore or public library?

FAMILY CONSIDERATIONS

- Does my spouse want to live in rural Arkansas?
- Are appropriate employment opportunities available for my spouse?
- If I am not married now, am I likely to be married at the time I establish practice?
- What is the quality of education in the local schools?
- Are there a variety of extra curricular activities?
- Do I (or does anyone in my family) have health concerns, such as allergies, that may impact my choice of community?

COMMUNITY CONSIDERATIONS

- Do I have first-hand experience of what it is like to live in rural Arkansas?
- What is it like to live in this particular community?
- Have I talked with a variety of people about life in the community?
- What is the growth potential for the community?
- Is housing readily available that appeals to me?
- Are professional services available, such as banking, health care, dental care, auto dealerships, and auto repair?

ARE YOU SUITED FOR RURAL PRACTICE?

If you can check the majority of these statements, you may be well suited for rural practice:

- I want to practice the full range of primary care.
- My family and I would enjoy a rural lifestyle
- I am willing to assume a position of leadership in the community.
- I am willing to take an active role in civic and community groups.
- I can handle the intermingling of my personal and professional roles.
- I would enjoy a closely-knit community.
- I would enjoy being involved in the lives of my patients.
- I want to fulfill a vital community need.
- I am challenged by rural health issues and see myself as an agent for change.
- I am skilled at developing good working relationships with other health professionals.
- I am adept at developing linkages between physicians and facilities.
- I don't mind long hours when there is a balance in my life.
- I believe that rural practice will give me back more than I put in.

ASK YOURSELF...

Which would I prefer?

- I prefer to build my own practice from scratch.
- I prefer to buy an existing practice.
- I prefer to develop a practice with one of more colleagues.
- I prefer to buy a share in an existing practice.
- I prefer to work in a practice, but not own it.

Which size of practice is right for me?

- I prefer to work by myself.
- I prefer to work with one other physician.
- I prefer to work with two other physicians.
- I prefer to work with three or more physicians.
- The number of physicians within the practice itself is not important, as long as arrangements can be made for sufficient coverage and backup.

What amount of control would I prefer over financial matters and personnel?

- I prefer to have little or no responsibility for this area.
- I prefer to have some degree of responsibility.
- I prefer to have oversight responsibility.
- I prefer to have complete responsibility.

What type of compensation system would I prefer?

- Private, fee for service
- Guaranteed minimum salary
- Salary plus incentives
- Capitation (HMO)

What are my preferences regarding scope of practice?

- I would like my practice to be ambulatory-based only.
- I would like to include an active hospital practice.
- I would like to include practice in a skilled-nursing facility.
- I would like my practice to include obstetrics.
- I would like my practice to include surgery.

These questions along with your answers may help you organize your thoughts about the type of practice that would best meet your preferences and needs. Keep in mind that your preferences may change over time, and further experience may lead you to seek more or less autonomy. Your contractual obligation is to the rural community you choose—NOT any clinic or hospital.