

College of Micronesia FSM Launches Doctors and Dentists for Tomorrow

The College of Micronesia FSM is excited to announce the launch of the Doctors and Dentists for Tomorrow program. Doctors and Dentists for Tomorrow is a collaborative effort between COM-FSM and the Pacific Island Health Officers' Association to prepare the best and brightest students from across the Federated States of Micronesia to become the physicians and dentists of tomorrow.

As the FSM continues to labor under the growing burden of non-communicable diseases, and as our existing physician and dentist workforce approaches retirement, there is a critical need for the next generation of Micronesian students to become the providers of tomorrow. That is what the Doctors and Dentists for Tomorrow program is about: identifying high achieving high school graduates from all four states of the FSM who have what it takes to succeed in medical and dental school.

Recruitment is currently underway across all high schools in the FSM, with the full support of both the national and state governments, who are working tirelessly to address the provider shortage.

Identified candidates will be screened by a committee appointed by each state government. Ultimately, six candidates from each state, for a total of 24 candidates, will be chosen to enter the Doctors and Dentists for Tomorrow program. Doctors and Dentists for Tomorrow is an intensive 24-month course of study specifically geared towards what students need to succeed in the first year of medical and dental school. It will include science, math, communications, as well as academic study skills for success.

The program will begin with intensive summer camp session in which students will begin their journey towards becoming the doctors and dentists of tomorrow. Not only will students receive academic training in the health sciences during this summer camp, but they will begin the process of becoming part of the culture of medicine as they are introduced to topics such as professionalism and ethics; and through exposure to mentors drawn from the local medical and dental community.

This process will continue across the curriculum, where in addition to high-quality, health science-centered academics, the students will also participate in field placements where they will be exposed to practitioners in a variety of settings, including clinical and public health placements. This early clinical exposure will serve to help students maintain a high level of motivation, as well as becoming further ingrained in the culture of medicine and dentistry.

The bulk of courses will be taught using a Problem Based Learning (PBL) approach. There are several reasons for the use of this innovative tool. First, in a PBL course, students take responsibility for their own learning as they research a specific real-world problem. Students must research the background of the problem, and then develop solutions to such as a learning cohort. In the PBL classroom the professor serves as learning coach, ensuring that students meet the specific outcomes for a topic. The high involvement of the student in a practical issue, along with student-centered learning, results in greater retention and application of the materials. Such an approach is clearly in-line with the mission of COM-FSM to provide student-centered learning.

The second reason for a PBL approach focuses on the College of Medicine, Nursing, and Health Sciences at Fiji National University (formerly Fiji School of Medicine). Studies have shown that when Pacific island students attend medical and dental school at Pacific institutions, they return to serve their home populations. When they attend medical and dental school overseas, or on the US mainland, the likelihood of their returning is much smaller. As such, the focus of the D&DT program is to prepare students to enter medical and dental school at Fiji National University, which uses an exclusive PBL approach to learning.

The Fiji School of Medicine has been training the healthcare workforce of the Pacific with a strong and dedicated history dating back to 1885. In 2010, when the Fiji School of Medicine became part of Fiji National University, that mission and dedication to prepare high-quality physicians and nurses for the Pacific continued. With the launch of Doctors and Dentists for Tomorrow program, students from across the FSM will receive the high-quality preparatory training they need to compete for entry into the medical and dental program at FNU, and then return to care for their own right here in the FSM.

COM-FSM is dedicated to providing graduates who are prepared to meet the needs of the FSM. And now, with the launch of the Doctors and Dentists for Tomorrow program, COM-FSM can play a critical role in preparing its graduates to meet the future medical and dental needs of the communities they call home.

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