First Grads Give Rural Track High Marks
Five are Family Medicine residents in Colorado

The following is the fifth in a series of articles about the Rural Track at the University of Colorado Denver School of Medicine. For more information, see previous articles in the CAFP Magazine or at http://www.ucdenver.edu/sonm/rural. Family Physicians interested in hosting a Rural Track student can contact program director Mark Deutchman, MD, at mark.deutchman@ucdenver.edu or 303-724-9725.

Having begun in 2006, the first class of Rural Track students at the University of Colorado Denver School of Medicine graduated in May 2009.

“The Rural Track offered great additional opportunities on top of the medical education we were getting in school,” stated Scott Samelson, MD, a member of the Rural Track class of 2009. “It especially offered hands-on practice as well as the support to practice primary care in small towns – because almost everyone else thinks that idea is crazy.”

Graduate Paul Buisseret, MD, wrote, “Overall, the Rural Track was valuable because it constantly kept the idea of rural medicine in my mind and provided wonderful mentors.”

Among the mentors was program director Mark Deutchman, MD. “Dr. Deutchman was obviously the driving force behind the Rural Track and his mentoring was great encouragement and support to do something different with medicine,” Dr. Samelson wrote. Limon physician Jack Westfall, MD, MPH, associate dean of rural health, was also mentioned as a significant influence.

Dr. Buisseret stated, “The lectures from providers in rural areas about managing a practice, what they see and do and reimbursement were also very useful. It was also practically very useful to learn about all the resources available to help physicians just out of residency get established in a rural area.”

Of the 15 medical students who started the first class in the first Rural Track class, 13 graduated in May 2009, including five who have entered three different Family Medicine residencies in the state.

Dr. Samelson is a resident at Fort Collins Family Medicine Residency Program, while Dr. Buisseret is a resident at the St. Joseph Family Medicine Residency Program, as is Kelly Smith, MD. Andrea Wismann, MD, and Jena Valdez, MD, matched with the University of Colorado Family Medicine Residency Program.

Originally from Colorado Springs, Dr. Samelson, who speaks Spanish, started an outdoor adventure guiding company in Costa Rica after working for the Outward Bound school there. When he decided to go into medicine about six years ago, he wrote, “I was fairly certain at the time that I would go into Family Medicine. I had been living in small towns in the U.S. mountains the prior eight winters and then working in Central America, South America, the Caribbean the rest of the year, as well as traveling in between these jobs.

“But I always was in small towns or out in the middle of nowhere with no towns while working as an outdoor guide and educator. I got into medicine because I was taking care of patients who had injured themselves in the middle of the rainforest, or climbing mountains or on a remote river and found that I liked the ability to help those in immediate need, I liked the mental component of figuring out what best to do as well as how to evacuate someone from the middle of the rainforest with no phones, communication or complex medical equipment.”

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Dr. Buisseret is a Chicago native who obtained a geology degree in Canada before working for five years as a gold exploration geologist in Alaska. He had friends in medicine and a general interest in science and biology, but, he wrote, “I didn’t really know what any of the health professions were all about. It took me years to decide to go to school and a lot of rumination about whether it should be P.A., nursing or med school.” He became an emergency medical technician, served as a volunteer and worked as a medical assistant for three years.

He decided on primary care more readily. “I was interested in primary care from the get-go, but kept an open mind throughout medical school,” he wrote. “In the end, the variety of medicine and opportunities attracted me to Family Medicine. The Rural Track appealed to me because of my time in Alaska and hope one day to return, in some capacity, to a more remote area.”

In addition to the five Rural Track graduates who are in Colorado residency programs in Family Medicine, two others matched with Family Medicine residencies in other states and one plans to earn a master’s degree in public health before entering a Family Medicine residency. The remaining five graduates are in residencies in pediatrics, emergency medicine and general surgery. The two students who started but did not finish with the class of 2009 plan to graduate by 2011.