

Vallejo's Kaiser Permanente starts family medicine residency program

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Because family doctors deal with all kinds of people, Vallejo's ethnic diversity is a big plus in recruiting for the new family medicine residency program Kaiser Permanente's putting together here, a spokeswoman and teaching doctor said.

It will be Kaiser's first family medicine residency program in Northern California, they said.

The new program, set to launch in July, means more medical students aiming to be primary care doctors can complete their training here, teacher/doctor Sherry Fung-Sakita said.

"We're hoping to train new primary care physicians to serve the community," Fung-Sakita said. "This is exciting, because there's a nationwide shortage of such doctors, who treat patients of all ages and both genders, from pre-natal to geriatrics, and also do procedures and work with women's health."

The idea is to turn out more doctors with community medicine skills and, hopefully, some will elect to remain here, she said.

For the residency program's first year, Fung-Sakita said there have been more than 400 applications so far from around the country and the world. Meanwhile, fourth year medical students from Tuoro, UCLA, UC Davis, New York Medical College, University of Florida, Western, and others, will be getting this specialized training at Kaiser Vallejo, she said.

Other changes at Kaiser Vallejo's family medicine department include new paint in more relaxing hues and artwork by staff and patients' children going up on the walls, Fung-Sakita said.

"My patients are loving it; they're excited because they know they're helping train new doctors," she said. "My patients know they're helping them work on their bedside manner, and they really love it. They say, this is kinda like (the television show) 'House,' but you guys are nice."

Kaiser spokeswoman Chyresse Hill said Tuesday during an interview with several Drexel Philadelphia medical school students, rotating through Kaiser Vallejo, that this development is par for the course.

"Kaiser Permanente is enthusiastically involved in medical education in a number of ways -- with medical students, like the ones from Drexel, and with medical residents," Hill said.

The Drexel students, mostly third-year medical students, are among 17 to get hands-on training in various disciplines, at several Kaiser facilities, including Vallejo's. The arrangement allows Drexel students to study at Kaiser facilities in Sacramento and Solano counties.

Program participants Pierce Johnson, Halley Park and David Lin agreed that being doctors is the best way to combine a love of science with a desire to help others.

"This is my second rotation. I did psychiatry before this," said Park, 27, of Death Valley, adding that she chose medicine because "it's fulfilling helping people feel better."

Johnson, 27, from Wala Wala, Wash., said he was as surprised as anyone when he chose to become a doctor.

"My father is a doctor and it was the last thing I wanted to do, but I found I really want to interact with people and this is the best way to blend scientific knowledge and personal interaction," he said.

A Milbrae resident, Lin, 26, said he came to medicine as a reaction to illness in his family.

"I want to be challenged, to keep learning and bettering myself," he said.

This summer, some 17 of Drexel's medical students began a year of clinical rotations at Kaisers in Vallejo, Sacramento, South Sacramento and Roseville, working and training in pediatrics, obstetrics/gynecology,

surgery, outpatient psychiatry, family medicine and adult medicine.

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