



Press Release

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UW Residency Programs Receive Key Federal Health Care Designation

Laramie — A new federal designation for the University of Wyoming Family Medicine Residency Programs in Casper and Cheyenne will allow them to focus on increasing access to care for thousands of medically and financially underserved residents in Wyoming’s two most populated areas, Laramie and Natrona counties.

The residency programs, doing business as the Educational Health Center of Wyoming (EHCW), this month received designation as a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) Look Alike organization from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Following an 18-month process that included a 95-page application and a visit by federal site reviewers, the EHCW was deemed compliant with the 19 program requirements of a health center and health center Look Alike.

To achieve compliance, EHCW staff members conducted a needs assessment for the EHCW service area of Natrona and Laramie counties; demonstrated accessibility of services, expanded hours and after-hours care; maintained quality improvement protocols; demonstrated financial management and budgetary oversight; and provided proof of a local governing board that oversees the credentialing and privileging process of EHCW providers and ensures appropriate governance of the residency programs.

“This designation will provide us with the additional resources to both increase and improve access to care for our underserved population,” says CEO Dr. Beth Robitaille. “Both residency programs have been providing comprehensive health care to Wyoming residents for more than 30 years and, now that we are a FQHC Look Alike, the benefits will allow us to strengthen our efforts to improve the health and well-being of the people who live in our communities.”

The designation will bring profound benefits to the EHCW and its patients. The EHCW will receive millions of dollars in enhanced Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements, which will support the purchase of necessary medical equipment and the recruitment and retention of quality practitioners who can increase access to care by serving more patients. Enhanced reimbursements also will offset the astronomical costs of uncompensated care and help to ensure financial viability of the organization.

“We have been tasked by Governor Mead and the Wyoming Legislature to seek viable financial models for the residency programs, and achieving the Educational Health Center was one of the recommended avenues for the Residency Stakeholders Working Group,” says Joseph Steiner, EHCW board chairman and dean of the College of Health Sciences at UW. “In addition to the financial benefit of enhanced reimbursements, loan repayments will support our recruitment and retention efforts, and affordable prescriptions will relieve some of the financial burden of our more vulnerable patient population.”

EHCW patients will receive significantly discounted medications under the 340B Drug Pricing Program as a result of the designation. This program is offered to FQHC and FQHC Look Alike health centers in an effort to remove financial barriers to care. The EHCW will collaborate with local pharmacies to offer many expensive medications at a much lower cost to its patients.

The FQHC Look Alike designation also will give the EHCW the opportunity to serve as a National Health Service Corps member site, providing valuable loan repayment for providers and increasing the likelihood of recruiting and retaining exceptional practitioners.

“Ultimately, this designation will have a major impact on the way we serve our communities,” Steiner says. “The additional resources and funding will allow us to teach our residents and other health professional students we train to aspire to excellence in the delivery of health care across the state.”

Established in 1976 and 1980 in Casper and Cheyenne, respectively, the EHCW clinics are community-based residency programs governed by a 10-member board. Serving more than 17,000 people each year, the EHCW provides full-spectrum family medicine to people of all ages. Services include women’s health, osteopathic medicine, sports medicine, behavioral health, x-ray and lab, nursing home care and palliative care, geriatric care, internal medicine and medication management, case management, specialty and procedure clinics, patient education and inpatient hospital care.

The EHCW promotes health professional education through quality health, dental and other health-related services to the citizens of Wyoming without regard for their ability to pay.

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