



Dr. Gary Button and Denise Pine, M3, discuss the Rural Medical Education clerkship. Denise's community project will focus on farm safety.

Family doctor shapes one student's decision to enroll in RMED program

Add one part desire to return home, one part love of country life, one part ground-breaking medical education and one part excellent mentor. What do you get? You get the rural medical education of Denise Pine, M3, University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford.

Denise's story has roots in small-town doctor and member of the Rural Medical Education Recruitment and Retention Committee at the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford, George Mitchell, MD, of Marshall, Illinois. Dr. George, as he is known in the community, has been a doctor for more than 60 years and was

Denise's grandfather's doctor when her grandfather was a young man. Before long, all the members of the Pine family were patients of Dr. George – including Denise. While Denise always looked up to Dr. George and was interested in medicine, she didn't plan to follow in his footsteps. Denise loved the farm and wanted to spend her days tending to the medical needs of farm animals like those on her family farm.

"I really don't like cats. . ."

"I really wanted to be a vet[erinarian]," says Denise. "But that all changed when I worked in the vet

clinic in college and I had to do a lot of work on cats. I discovered I *really* don't like cats." While at home one weekend, Denise shared her predicament with Dr. George and confided that she thought she might like working with people better.

"Dr. George really encouraged me to follow my heart and try it," says Denise. "I gave it a lot of thought and soon changed my major to pre-med. I knew I wanted to go home and be on the farm again but I realized that didn't mean that I had to work there. I could incorporate my interest in science and my love for life in a small town and be a rural physician caring

for the people in my own community.” And that is just what Denise plans to do.

Being a rural physician means more than caring for people when they are sick or in the office. “I really want to build a family practice — deliver babies, talk about farm safety, help reduce the rate of teen pregnancies — there are so many health problems in small towns,” says Denise. “I hope to help make a difference. If I can be half as successful as Dr. George, my medical career will be fulfilling and meaningful.”

More than being a doctor

Denise explains that there is little in the town of Marshall that Dr. George hasn't been involved with one way or another. “If you can think of it, he's been involved,” says Denise. “Politics, getting other people involved, everything. He's the kind of guy who gets an idea and then starts calling people until he gets cooperation. I have learned from him that you can't do everything yourself.”

Community doctor equals involvement

When Denise returns to Marshall next year to serve her 16-week externship with Dr. George's partner Dr. Turner, she plans to start making a difference right away. Part of the program for RMED students is a community-based project that assesses a rural health issue and implements a strategy to solve the problem or understand it better.

“We have already talked about my community project for next year,” says Denise. “While I would like to do something about the teen pregnancy rate, Dr. George suggested that I do a project that will really make an impact in the 16 weeks that I will be there. It's hard to impact teen pregnancy rates in only 16 weeks. Instead we are going to work on farm safety.”

Farm safety is close to Denise's heart. As a child growing up on a farm, Denise saw firsthand the potential dangers of farm work and knows that accidents can significantly and permanently alter a farmer's ability to make a living and run the farm. “Preventing farm accidents is an important issue. Usually problems happen because they weren't adequately prevented,” says Denise. “Dr. George and I agree that we can make a significant impact in a short time.”

Looking forward to coming home

But completing her medical education isn't a short-term project. “I've really missed being at home,” says Denise. “Every day I'm not on the farm I feel like I'm missing out on something. But, I know it will be worth it in the end.” Denise has one more year of medical school after this year and then will do a family practice residency to complete her training before returning to Marshall and starting practice with Dr. George, Dr. Turner and their other two partners.

“I hope to do my residency at Union Hospital in Terre Haute, Indiana,” says Denise. “They have a strong obstetrics program and a six-month c-section fellowship after residency. They also have a rural medicine track that will really complement the education I have had in Rockford.” An added bonus is that Terre Haute is just a hop, skip and a jump from home, including her family and the mentor who has helped her find her life's calling.

“I am so grateful to Dr. George for his mentoring and advice,” says Denise. “I just can't put into words how amazing he is and how good he has been to me. He's a remarkable person — the way he's supported me just because he knows I'm dedicated to what I want to do. He has been such a tremendous role model to me.”

Record Breaking Year!

The Rural Medical Education (RMED) program at the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford had its largest number of applicants ever for the Class of 2006. RMED faculty members are now reviewing a record 92 applications. From these, 30 to 35 students will be invited to campus for formal interviews in January. Up to 20 students can participate in the program each year.

International Recognition

The Network Conference 2001, Challenges of Primary Care-Oriented Health Systems, in conjunction with the World Health Organization (WHO) was held on October 20-25 at Londrina Parana, Brazil.

Presented were the following:

- *Rural Health Professions Education: Innovative and Collaborative Strategies to Address Primary Care Needs*, Michael Glasser, PhD, Richard Londo, MD, B. Salafsky, PhD, and Tiffanie Fecht, M4
- *Community Structure: Going Beyond the Examination Room*, Michael Glasser, PhD, Richard Londo, MD, and Tiffanie Fecht, M4
- *COPC Projects: Education to Meet Community Health Needs*, Tiffanie Fecht, M4, B. Salafsky, PhD, and Richard Londo, MD
- *Residency: Match and Practice Location: Increasing Access in the Rural Sector*, Richard Londo, MD, Michael Glasser, PhD, and B. Salafsky, PhD
- *Special Initiatives: Grants to Address Rural Health Problems*, Michael Glasser, PhD, and Richard Londo, MD
- *RPEER: Development of an Interdisciplinary Health Professions Center*, B. Salafsky, PhD, and Michael Glasser, PhD