

For Immediate Release
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SGMC Health Becomes Clinical Campus for Mercer University School of Medicine

SGMC Health is the newest clinical campus for Mercer University School of Medicine (MUSM). Beginning this Summer, SGMC Health will welcome its first class of third- and fourth-year medical students.

According to Mercer, the goal of developing a clinical site in Valdosta is to allow medical students to experience the high-quality care offered by a tertiary medical center that serves rural communities. MUSM only admits Georgia residents and favors students from rural areas. Opening a clinical site in Valdosta expands the School's reach to a critical medically underserved region.

Clerkship Directors are responsible for guiding clinical curriculum and rotations at SGMC Health include Meghan Gallagher, DO (Internal Medicine); Brian Griner, MD (Pediatrics); Anthony Johnson, MD (Family Medicine); Paresh Thanki, MD (Psychiatry); Ene Grace Morgan, MD (OBGYN); and James Davis, MD (Surgery).

SGMC Health President and Chief Executive Officer Ronald E. Dean shared, "SGMC Health is very proud of our partnership with Mercer University School of Medicine and we are incredibly grateful for the opportunity to partner in the development of the MUSM Valdosta clinical campus."

SGMC Health and MUSM's partnership began in 2020 with the establishment of an ACGME-accredited internal medicine residency program. Since its first class the program has been fully matched and now hosts 24 interns.

"What began as a strategic affiliation to develop residency training programs at SGMC Health has given way to an even greater opportunity to expand the pipeline of well-trained physicians for South Georgia. The dedication of our medical staff, employees and volunteers to support this endeavor is commendable and will shape the physician work force for our health system for years to come."

The MUSM Valdosta campus will be located in a dedicated Medical Education Unit within the main campus at 2501 N Patterson Street. Beginning in July 2024, the site will offer all required clerkships and electives of Year 3, as well as the sub-internship, elective, and required elective rotations for Year 4 of the MD program. SGMC has a 15-county service area, much of which is rural so this affiliation offers an opportunity to advance the mission of MUSM by adding more rural clinical experiences to the clerkship and post-clerkship phases.

"Mercer University School of Medicine is honored to partner with SGMC Health," stated Dr. Jean Sumner, dean of School of Medicine. "The opportunity to partner with SGMC gives our students a chance to experience a comprehensive rural hospital environment with excellent physicians, other highly trained professionals and the latest equipment and technology. Also, the spirit of commitment to the region and the patients who use SGMC's services is impressive. Our students are all from Georgia and many are from south Georgia. Our expectation is with this experience they will choose to stay in the region to practice."

MUSM graduate Joseph Hayes, MD, and current Designated Institutional Official at SGMC, will lead the Valdosta campus as associate dean. Dr. Hayes shared, "We are proud to take this next step in supporting and propelling medical education in South Georgia. SGMC Health has assembled an esteemed team of faculty who truly considers it an honor to serve in this capacity, inspiring and leading our next generation of doctors."

Amari Evans is a rising third-year medical student from Valdosta and will be transferring from the MUSM Columbus campus to complete her medical education at the new clinical site within SGMC Health.

"My first job in healthcare was at SGMC Health as a medical scribe in the emergency department, so this is a full-circle moment for me. I am very excited to be able to complete my clinical years in Valdosta and to serve the community that has raised me," said Evans. "Having a clinical campus in Valdosta contributes to Mercer students' journey of becoming a successful Georgia physician by giving us an opportunity to serve a wide demographic of patients. I believe that the culture of Valdosta and the mission of MUSM will be a beautiful blend and will attract students to practice in the area."

SGMC Health is currently constructing a medical simulation center to allow medical practice activities, including standardized patient encounters, to be provided on-site in Valdosta. This simulation center will also offer interdisciplinary training sessions in partnership with health professions programs at nearby Valdosta State University. Clinical partners provide all facilities including clinical skills exam rooms and simulation lab space. SGMC has allocated \$250,000 for virtual reality and high-fidelity models for ultrasound and procedural training, which are comparable to those available on the other MUSM campuses.

For more information visit sgmc.org.