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FUTURE OF NURSING™ CAMPAIGN FOR ACTION

Head Start Partnership to Expand Pediatric Clinical Opportunities

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Abstract

The capacity to educate Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP)/Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) students is reliant on access to quality clinical sites. The shortage of clinical sites is of national concern, with access to pediatric primary care sites being the most critical. Without adequate sites, DNP/APRN programs are forced to reduce their class sizes, impacting the pipeline of adequately trained primary care providers. This past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has further restricted the supply of clinical sites, especially pediatric sites. The access to quality pediatric clinical experiences is imperative to the University of Maryland School of Nursing (UMSON) maintaining its ability to prepare DNP/APRN students and requires an innovative model to address this critical need. One opportunity to meet the need for additional pediatric sites is to explore partnerships with community providers.

Federally funded Early Head Start (EHS) and Head Start (HS) programs provide comprehensive early childhood education to infants and young children through the age of 5. Enrollment in EHS/HS centers is contingent on having updated health records including a physical exam, screenings, and immunizations. With the pandemic, access to many health services have been restricted, especially preventive care. Children enrolled in EHS/HS programs have had limited access to primary care providers to receive these important services.

In 2018, UMSON DNP/APRN faculty and students began providing supplemental well child examinations on site at EHS and HS centers in Baltimore. UMSON proposed to expand this partnership to include additional EHS/HS centers in Baltimore and counties proximal to the Universities at Shady Grove (USG) to provide students at both campuses access to community-based pediatric sites. This partnership not only fills a critical gap in pediatric primary care sites for the DNP/APRN students but also provides access to required examinations and screenings for children enrolled in EHS/HS programs in Maryland.

Although the global pandemic limited expansion of the partnership this past fall, UMSON DNP/APRN faculty and students were able to provide onsite physical exams and screenings to 46 children at one HS and four EHS centers from October to December 2020. The encounters identified several unmet health care needs for this vulnerable population: 74% needed immunizations, 39% needed lead screening, and 30% needed anemia screening. Over half the children were referred for additional services or specialty care for concerns identified during the

exam: elevated blood pressure (n=2); weight concerns including obesity (n=3), overweight (n=8), and underweight (n=2); and abnormal development (n=10). As EHS and HS centers have prepared to return to in-person learning, the need for onsite physical exams has increased. This semester, we have expanded our partnership with three new HS organizations that provide services at multiple HS centers in Baltimore and Anne Arundel counties while maintaining our existing partnerships. This semester, we expect to more than double the services provided in the fall with additional faculty and students participating. Despite the pandemic limiting services, this partnership has positively impacted both DNP/APRN students and the children and families enrolled in EHS/HS programs.