

Medical Student Experience Reflection Essay

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Aitkin, a town of around 2,000 people, is located about two hours north of the Twin Cities in a beautiful part of Minnesota, with many lakes and trees. This community is small, but full of residents that really care about their town and actively participate in community events. There are a lot of people who permanently live in Aitkin, but there are also many people who vacation in Aitkin, especially in the summer. One interesting fact about the community as a whole is that Aitkin has an aging population, leading to a need for physicians to take care of many Medicare patients.

Riverwood Healthcare Center offers a diverse set of services that many residents utilize. In Aitkin, the hospital provides an emergency room, 25 inpatient rooms, and an intensive care unit. They also have an on-site clinic attached to the hospital. The Aitkin clinic is staffed by physicians, nurse practitioners and nurses, that together meet the needs of the patients on a daily basis. In the clinic, urgent care is available five days a week for those who need it. Riverwood's main campus in Aitkin is special because not only do they offer family practice clinic services, but they also have a specialty clinic where patients can see a cardiologist, OB/GYN, orthopedic doctors, ear, nose, and throat specialists, allergists, pulmonologists, dermatologists, and psychologists to name a few. The providers in the clinic refer to these doctors regularly if the patient can benefit from their service. Doctors can also refer to specialists at other clinics/facilities in the area, such as Brainerd or St. Cloud, if the service needed by the patient is not offered within the Riverwood system or if the patient desires to use other facilities.

Another unique feature of the Riverwood Healthcare system is that there are affiliated smaller clinics located in McGregor and Garrison that patients can utilize, increasing the availability of appointments and reducing the commute for many patients. Based on my observation, the Riverwood Healthcare system truly cares about its patients and even though it is a rural location, the facility provides for patients in a sufficient and efficient way. The "small town" feel is evident at this clinic, where doctors remember their patients and have relationships with families. I felt that many patients were grateful for the access they had to healthcare and I felt privileged to be a part of a rural healthcare system like Riverwood.

My personal experience as a medical student in Aitkin was rewarding in many ways. From the second I arrived on the Riverwood campus I felt at home. Everyone I met was friendly and welcoming, with each person making sure I had my questions answered. I was impressed with the facility itself, it was small, but had many resources and offers many specialty care options. I had the opportunity to spend many hours in the primary care clinic with Dr. Don Hughes, a day with Dr. Austin Krohn, a few days in the ER with Dr. Taylor, and time in the OR with Dr. Chough in ortho and Dr. Michael Cady and Dr. Rachel Cady in OB/GYN. I especially enjoyed the time I spent in clinic with Dr. Hughes. These clinic times were packed with patients and there were very few breaks throughout the day, which I enjoyed a lot. The busy daily schedule kept the day exciting and filled with opportunities to

learn. Although Dr. Hughes generally sees older and more complex patients, I learned a lot about the importance of patience, empathy, and organization while addressing health and personal issues that a patient may have. Dr. Hughes was helpful and welcoming and made me feel like part of the health care team. He encouraged me to talk to patients on my own and to be an advocate for my own experience. I was able to practice taking histories and conducting physical exams, which will help me as I continue learning as a medical student.

Working with Dr. David Taylor in the emergency room was another highlight of my experience. Although I didn't always know the answers to his questions, I appreciated the constant education he provided throughout our time together. He truly made me feel like medical students were appreciated and his desire to teach made my experience great. I learned so much in the short time I worked with Dr. Taylor, whether that be procedural learning, re-learning things I have already been taught, or learning the importance of being confident that I am where I am supposed to be. It was fun and rewarding to meet and work with the emergency room patients and I hope my experience in the Aitkin ER will allow me to compare and appreciate other ER experiences I will have in the future.

My short trip to Aitkin definitely exceeded my expectations. I especially learned a lot about what living and working in a small town would be like. Working in a rural town definitely offers a different perspective of health care that isn't always evident in a big city. I had the privilege to meet many of the doctors, health professionals, administrative staff, and community members. Hearing the stories of how each person ended up in Aitkin and why they love the town was extremely rewarding. Each patient had a unique story and I loved being able to talk to patients in clinic and be a part of their health care experience. Through working with Dr. Hughes I witnessed the impact and importance of taking the time to talk to patients, giving them the time they need in the clinic. It was refreshing to work with a physician that genuinely cared about the patient's well being, even if it meant running behind in the daily schedule. I was touched by the fact that almost every patient expressed that I was extremely lucky to be working with and learning from such a great doctor. I will definitely remember my experience as I advance in my medical training and in my future practice as well. I can only hope that someday my patients will respect and appreciate me as much as Dr. Hughes' patients respect and appreciate him. Working in Aitkin this summer was definitely a highlight in my medical training so far; I would go back in a heartbeat.