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CLARIFICATION

A story on Page A3 on Monday about Health Plan of San Joaquin's pharmacy residency program included a quote attributed to Jenny Dominguez, Health Plan health promotions and cultural and linguistics manager, that was in reference to Health Plan's revamped Health Careers Scholarship Program, not the residency program.

HEALTH CARE

Pharmacy residency program improves training

By Joe Goldeen
Record Staff Writer

FRENCH CAMP — The chronic shortage of health care professionals has been the reality in San Joaquin County for decades. That well-documented need has led to many organizations embracing “growing our own” doctors and nurses such as the San Joaquin Medical Society's Decision Medicine program and Stockton Unified's Health Careers Academy.

One of the lesser known efforts is the pharmacy residency program at Health Plan of San Joaquin, now entering its 10th year.

Unlike physicians, who spend years as interns and residents following medical school, pharmacists typically start practicing their profession once they've graduated with a pharmacy degree and received their license. A residency program is not a requirement.

Health Plan's program is one of just 38 managed-care pharmacy residency programs throughout the United States, with about one-third of those programs located in California. It is nationally accredited by the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists and the Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy and was recently awarded a three-year Health Plan Accreditation for its Medicaid/HMO line of business from the National Committee for Quality Assurance.

“A managed care residency is probably the best path for pharmacists aspiring to a clinical nondispensing leadership position,” said Alan Shek, associate dean for professional programs at the University of the Pacific Thomas J. Long School of Pharmacy and Health Sciences. Shek is a former director of pharmacy at Health Plan who started the residency program in 2006 and served as its program director through 2013.

Health Plan's residents come from throughout the country. This year's resident just happens to be a Pacific pharmacy graduate. Of the school's 200 graduates this year, 85 applied for one of more than 3,000 mostly hospital residency programs and 36 were matched into a program, according to Shek.

Three former Health Plan

residents are working for the agency now, including Jonathan Yeh, director of clinical programs; Jonathan Szkotak, the current director of pharmacy; and pharmacist Brenda Ng, the most recent graduate of the program.

Ng, 27, who grew up in a small Indiana town, said her residency added “great value” to both her education and her career.

“Two things stand out: the concept of leadership, and well-roundedness. I think they look for residents with the greatest potential to grow into a leadership role,” she said. “When we ask questions of applicants, we ask a lot of personality questions. That's not something you normally expect.”

Other graduates are in management positions with organizations such as Well-Point, MedImpact and Davita.

Health Plan of San Joaquin, a nonprofit Medi-Cal managed-care health plan spawned by the county in 1996, is now the largest provider of those services in both San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties with approximately 315,000 members, the vast majority of whom are underserved families and individuals.

It's a unique population with needs that differ markedly from other regions of California. For example, most of Health Plan's members are seen by primary care physicians, not specialists more familiar with certain medications. Local pharmacists will tell you that's an important point.

“With this program, we can reinvest the limited resources of our health plan in our community, collaborating with these schools to encourage and support the next generation of doctors, nurses and pharmacists,” said Jenny Dominguez, Health Plan's health promotions and cultural and linguistics manager, in a statement.

On Tuesday, two Pacific pharmacy students will be awarded \$2,500 scholarships during a ceremony at the school.

— Contact reporter Joe Goldeen at (209) 546-8278 or jgoldeen@recordnet.com. Follow him at recordnet.com/goldeenblog and on Twitter @JoeGoldeen.



Pharmacist Brenda Ng, left, and her boss, Jonathan Szkotak, director of pharmacy, share a light moment outside the French Camp headquarters of Health Plan of San Joaquin. Both pharmacists came through the organization's pharmacy residency program before being hired. JOE GOLDEEN/THE RECORD