With every new entering class come the fears and excitement of 72 fresh faces eager to begin their medical education. The Brody School of Medicine helps students to adjust to medical education with the Personal Professional Leadership Development Program (PPL). PPL, which started in 1998, pairs a clinician with a basic scientist as facilitators of groups of eight or nine randomly assigned first year students. The goal of PPL is to help students feel supported and cared for during their transition into medical school while also providing a safe environment for them to learn about themselves.

PPL also serves as a support group for students throughout their four years of medical education. Many students experience the impostor phenomenon and believe that they’re the only ones who are afraid, unsure, or anxious. Through the activities and interactions of PPL, the facilitators and fellow students help to normalize individuals’ feelings and thoughts as they share guidance and advice with each other. Just as PPL is beneficial to the students, it also benefits the facilitators. It allows faculty to serve as role models for both the personal and professional development of students. In addition, the PPL relationships further foster collegiality between faculty.

The PPL experience begins during the M1 orientation. On each day of the weeklong session, the students engage in a process of self-assessment, self-exploration, personal disclosure, team building, and the exploration of issues of diversity and professional conduct. For example, to help with team building, PPL groups (students and facilitators) engage in a ropes course that requires them to work together to deal with challenges. Whether it is catching each other in the trust fall or figuring out how to get team-

First year medical students work together “to slip a ring off the finger of a giant” while on the ECU Ropes Course.

Many students experience the impostor phenomenon and believe that they are the only ones who are afraid, unsure, or anxious.
The Media is Our Friend

I guess because I spent much of my free time in college working as a DJ at WFUV-FM in New York, I have never been afraid of the media. During both my academic and American Academy of Pediatrics careers, I have been media trained a few times, and am comfortable with the power and potential of it. Yes, I know physicians (and others) who get weak-kneed and sweaty-palmed at the thought of participating in a radio or television production, or even giving a newspaper interview. I know others, comfortable to do it, who refuse because of their mistrust of the press.

From where I sit now, I marvel about how unappreciated the Brody School of Medicine and ECU sometimes appear to be. Over the years, mostly from afar, I’ve watched with great interest the development of this school. I think about this year’s graduation in relation to the last 25, and note how well we’ve done in bringing primary medical care to the people of NC especially to eastern NC. I’m filled with pride at how well our students do when they are matched with peers from other NC institutions, as well as from institutions beyond our borders. Our students are good. Among the best I’ve encountered in my more than 30 years as a physician, and that holds true for graduates of our other professional and undergraduate schools.

Why is that? First and foremost there are quality students here, paired with quality faculty members. We then take the time to nurture them. An article in this newsletter speaks about our PPL program which Dr. Virginia Hardy has organized so well. We also support, intellectually, academically, and financially, a vigorous Schweitzer Fellowship Program, the largest and most productive of any medical school in North Carolina. We encourage our students to participate in summer research fellowships with established faculty scientists, and though most of our students choose careers in primary care, they do so with the knowledge of the power of science and its role in the art of medicine. We are a medical school. We pride ourselves on the teaching that we do, a pride that carries into the practices that many of our graduates join, so that they, too, work as teachers with our students during their community rotations.

A few months ago a leading news magazine recognized us in several categories as being among the best. That is important! We are among the best, but we are a little isolated here in rural eastern NC and need to regularly let the rest of the world know who we are and what we do. Garnishing research grants, publishing papers, presenting our work to learned bodies, and leading regional and national organizations, are critical to letting people know our strength.

The media, the popular medical literature, is another critically important way to make our presence felt, and we are fortunate to have a strong support staff to assist us in our relationship with the press. This newsletter goes far, but not nearly as far as a scientific journal, whose readership pales in comparison to any newspaper or magazine, or television program. It’s time for all of us, or at least those without sweaty palms, to get involved and use the media to help us help our people, and then to let them know how much we helped.
A Cause for Celebration

Joseph R. Zanga MD, FAAP
Jefferson Pilot Distinguished Professor in Primary Care
Assistant Dean, Generalist Programs

On May 8th, the Brody School of Medicine Class of 2004 received their diplomas. Congratulations Graduates!

It’s always nice to be recognized for the good work that you do, and this spring the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University had good reason to be justifiably proud. As published in the US News and World Report annual issue on “America’s Best Graduate Schools,” we were pleased to note our institution’s 19th place ranking among the top US medical schools emphasizing primary care. In specialty programs, rated by medical school deans and senior faculty, we ranked number four in rural medicine and were 15th in Family Medicine. As I talk to students and other faculty here, there is strong feeling that we’re actually better than that (and should have also ranked high in other specialty areas). We’re not resting on our laurels, but continue to work to prove to others what we already know.

Interestingly, that national news came only a few days after the Resident Match was announced. We are proud of the fact that some of our students are moving on to residency programs at institutions currently more highly rated than ours. We are just as proud (more proud!) of the 30% who are remaining at our institution and the 47% of our students going to Residencies in North Carolina. Primary Care continues to attract some of the best and brightest, with 48% of our graduates choosing those residencies, a figure that jumps to 57% if OB/GYN is added to the primary care total.

Finally, we received an excellent preliminary review from the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) which surveyed our program only weeks before Match Day.

All in all a strong showing for any school, certainly for a school as new as ours. And it is only getting better!
Culture of Caring  continued from Page 1

mates to safety through a spider web, students learn much about each other and themselves.

The groups meet regularly, with structured activities, in preparation for the first set of exams. After that the groups meet as often as they choose to process issues as they arise. Most groups tend to meet after each set of exams to debrief the experience and share any joys or disappointments. Groups are encouraged to continue throughout the second semester with the discretion to develop their own schedule.

Most of the students have enjoyed and benefited from the sharing and mentorship of the experience. PPL encourages strong relationships, self-reflection, peer support, collaboration, faculty support and role modeling, all of which aid in students’ adjustments to medical education.