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Hudson Headwaters and SUNY Upstate Launch North Country Medical Scholars

Inaugural Medical School Scholarship Winners, From Local Communities, Are Announced.

SYRACUSE, NY (October 21, 2025): Upstate Medical University’s Norton College of Medicine and Hudson Headwaters Health Network announced a new partnership this week aimed at building a stronger, healthier future for rural and underserved communities in the greater Glens Falls, Adirondack and Plattsburgh regions.

The North Country Medical Scholars Program is for students who are from—or deeply connected to—the communities served by Hudson Headwaters Health Network’s eight-county service region: Warren, Washington, Saratoga, Fulton, Hamilton, Essex, Clinton and Franklin counties.

The inaugural recipients are first year medical student Cole Carpenter, second year students Mairead Lawliss and Sarah Hoh and third year student, Rachel Milone. Recipients commit to one year of work at Hudson Headwaters for every year of assistance they receive, and they are eligible for up to \$45,000 per year for up to four years.

Robert F. Ruiz, Upstate’s interim vice president for educational services and dean of student affairs, said the goal of the initiative is to recruit, matriculate and retain interested and qualified undergraduates to the College of Medicine, reduce the cost of medical school for eligible students, and meet primary care physician needs in shortage areas of New York State throughout Hudson Headwaters’ service region.

“The emphasis will be the ability to grow the physician workforce for the North Country, the ability to make medical school more financially accessible for students from the region and most importantly, the ability to deliver more thorough and comprehensive care for the citizens of New York State and specifically the North Country,” he said.

A Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), Hudson Headwaters' mission is to provide care to everyone in the communities it serves, regardless of income or insurance. Their practitioners care for 9,400 patients each week, accounting for about 490,000 patient visits in 2024.

Family physician and Hudson Headwaters CEO Tucker Slingerland, M.D., stressed the importance of retaining local doctors who understand and are invested in the unique medical needs of rural communities.

"The future of rural medicine often begins with investing in people who already understand what makes our communities so special," he said. "Since my early days as vice president of strategy, I've hoped to formalize partnerships with medical schools that share our commitment to rural medicine. We found our first partner in Upstate. Several of our longstanding providers are proud alumni and we value the school's emphasis on rural health issues. The scholars' deep connections to their home communities will have a profound impact on the patients they serve."

Scholarship recipients were selected via a comprehensive application, screening and interview process conducted by the Hudson Headwaters team with consultation from the Upstate Offices of Admission and Student Affairs. In addition to tuition assistance, program participants will benefit from networking, clinical mentorship and other career development opportunities during medical school and beyond.

Carpenter, from Queensbury in Warren County, said he holds a deep love for his hometown and the surrounding area and can think of no place he would rather practice.

"I believe our community is unmatched in its proximity to natural beauty, cultural enrichment, and world-class metropolitan hubs, all while maintaining a uniquely welcoming and nurturing hometown culture," he said. "Conversely, I am not blind to the many challenges our region faces, both at the local and national scales, in providing high-quality healthcare. I plan to lend my unique strengths toward developing our response to these challenges, ensuring generations to come have the privilege of leading healthy, happy lives in our region."

Lawliss, from Plattsburgh in Clinton County acknowledged the role Hudson Headwaters Health Network plays in health care in her hometown.

"They filled a gap in care for many community members who were struggling to find a primary care provider after the closure of a medical office in town. In my eyes, Hudson Headwaters provides support in areas that need it. I want to be part of that mission. As a person who grew up in Plattsburgh, I know what it is like to have to wait months for a standard appointment because that is the only available time. Providing patients with more healthcare professionals improves the well-being of an entire community. I believe

providing this kind of service to a community is the most honorable way for a physician to use their medical degree.”

Sarah Hoh, from Conesus in Livingston County, has family who live in the Adirondacks, and has shadowed at Hudson Headwaters health centers in Saranac Lake and Tupper Lake. She said she enjoys working with individuals from rural communities.

“Growing up in a rural community and then having lived in the city has made me appreciate the opportunities to work with individuals from places like my hometown,” she said. “There is a certain warmth and honesty individuals from rural communities have. It reminds me of home, and I would be grateful to work with these individuals.”

Milone, from Pitcairn in St. Lawrence County, said her experience growing up in the underserved Adirondack Park is what inspired her to pursue medicine.

“I witnessed firsthand the need for access to high quality, comprehensive primary care,” she said. “This experience inspired me to pursue medicine and become a primary care physician. As a primary care physician, I hope to build long-term relationships with patients and communities giving me the ability to effectively treat a wide range of medical concerns while simultaneously improve the well-being of both individuals and communities.”

For more information on the scholarship program, email admiss@upstate.edu or call (315) 464-4570.

About Hudson Headwaters Health Network

Hudson Headwaters is a nonprofit network of 26 community-based primary care health centers serving patients of all ages from Saratoga County to the Canadian border, an area of about 7,900 square miles. The Network’s comprehensive services include primary care, urgent care, pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, behavioral health, dentistry and other specialties, along with laboratory and imaging services. Learn more at HHN.org.