



2020 Minnesota Rural Health Awards

Every year the **Minnesota Rural Health Awards** are announced at Minnesota's annual Rural Health Conference. As the 2020 conference was cancelled due to the pandemic, conference hosts announced this year's awards during Minnesota's [Rural Health Week, Nov 15 – 21](#).

The Minnesota Rural Health Awards are given to individuals and groups who have made a significant contribution to improving rural health in Minnesota.

The [Minnesota Rural Health Conference](#) is hosted by the Minnesota Department of Health's (MDH) Office of Rural Health and Primary Care (ORHPC), the Minnesota Rural Health Association (MRHA), and the National Rural Health Resource Center (The Center).

For more information, contact health.orhpc@state.mn.us

2020 Rural Health Lifetime Achievement Award



This year, the Minnesota Rural Health Lifetime Achievement Award goes to the Family Medicine/OB physician, **Deborah J. Erickson, MD**, at the Altru Clinic in Warroad. Born and raised in Warroad, Dr. Erickson saw firsthand her community's overwhelming healthcare needs and challenges, and returned to her hometown after medical school to serve as the single longest-term physician in Warroad. Dr. Erickson exemplifies what it means to be a family medicine physician by providing a wide array of procedures for a diverse community, through generations of patients of all ages. She understands

how crucial it is to have local access to quality health care and her lifelong knowledge of her community's particular needs has given her practice a unique expertise and has greatly benefited her patients. In addition to her case load, Dr. Erickson passes on her knowledge and her passionate commitment to rural health to medical students from the University of Minnesota Medical School-Duluth's Rural Medical Scholars Program.

The honor and satisfaction of serving her community has been passed on to her son, Dr. Dr. James Erickson, who recently completed his medical residency and will practice side by side with his mother for two years before she retires. It is a wonderful example of "rural health growing their own."

2020 Minnesota Rural Health Hero Award



This year's Minnesota Rural Health Hero Award goes to **Kim Kruger, MD**. A family medicine physician, she was drawn to the field of rural health care as early as high school, and it has remained a focus throughout her professional career.

Once out of medical school, Dr. Kruger spent four years as a family physician in

Buffalo and then nine years as a family physician and educator at the Duluth Family Medicine Residency Program. The last of those years were as the associate and program director. When the College of St. Scholastica decided to create a new Physician Assistant (PA) program, Dr. Kruger's interests in rural health, medicine and teaching made her a perfect candidate to help launch and develop an accredited program that could help address the shortage of primary care professionals throughout the state. Dr. Kruger has a reputation not only for teaching students the essentials of medicine, but also for developing compassionate and patient focused providers who will help provide quality health care across Minnesota into the future.

2020 Minnesota Rural Health Team Award

Aitkin, MN



Don Hughes, M.D.
and student
Hannah Thiry

Pipestone, MN



Student Alexandra
Ostfeld and
Kathleen Savio,
D.O.

Little Falls, MN



Student
Jacqueline
Blomker and Julie
Bell, M.D.

Windom, MN



Mary Olson, M.D.
student Rebecca
Fiers, Stephanie
Buhler, M.D.

This year's Minnesota Rural Team Award goes to **Rural Family Medicine Preceptors**. The shortage of rural physicians is a well-known challenge across the country. As part of the University of Minnesota Medical School-Duluth's Rural Medical Scholars Program, practicing family medicine physicians in rural Minnesota and Western Wisconsin mentor medical students who live and train with their preceptors and experience hands-on learning with patients of all ages. By teaching and modeling continuous and comprehensive care, these preceptors model the practices that form the basis for primary health care in our country.

Since 1973, more than 400 small community physicians have voluntarily taught first- and second-year medical students throughout their educational tenure in Duluth. The number of volunteer hours donated is well over 300,000.

Across the US, only about 5% to 7% of physicians practice in rural areas. Of the students who have begun their studies in Duluth and completed their training, 44% are practicing in communities with populations smaller than 25,000. It is believed that a good deal of this success is the result of working with the rural physicians, their patients and their communities during the formative years of medical school.

The above photos are just four of the many Rural Family Medicine Preceptors who have wholeheartedly accepted their responsibilities to train the future rural workforce. We thank them for their service and critical work.