10-29-2015

A Rite of Passage

University of Dayton

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The University of Dayton will host a white coat ceremony for its first cohort of physician assistant students, marking their transition into clinical training.

Students will receive their white coats and take a medical oath during the event, set for 4 p.m. Friday, Dec. 18, in the Kennedy Union ballroom. It's the first such ceremony for the program, which was started in 2014 and will graduate its first class in 2016.
“This is the rite of passage for medical professionals,” said Kelli Huesman, director of clinical education for the University’s physician assistant department. “It signifies that they are moving on to do what they are trained to do.”

The ceremony will also be significant for the master’s degree program, which is preparing to admit its third cohort of students in August. More than 900 people have already applied for the 40 seats available. The application deadline is Dec. 1.

“The inaugural white coat ceremony is an important milestone of progress for the PA program,” said Kevin Kelly, dean of the School of Education and Health Sciences. “When these students graduate in a year, they will be serving the medical needs of the Miami Valley and Ohio. The PA program is a new manifestation of UD’s traditional mission to serve community and the greater social good.”

The University of Dayton created the Master of Physician Assistant Practice program to help meet the demand for more health care professionals created in part by the Affordable Care Act. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates employment in the field will grow 38 percent between 2012 and 2020.

“There are just not enough physicians to cover the influx of millions of people who now have access to health care,” Huesman said. “The role of the physician assistant is expected to fill a huge void, particularly with family practice and rural medicine.”

Students in the first cohort will spend the next year completing rotations in family, internal and emergency medicine, orthopedics, general surgery, mental health, women’s health and pediatrics, as well as in one elective. They will work in the Dayton area, at the Cleveland Clinic or with Cincinnati-area hospitals.

Their white coats are being made by Prime Medical Apparel, owned by University of Dayton alumnus Jim Sampey. The coats are antimicrobial, designed to stop contamination between patients.

The students are writing their oath to reflect the program’s mission to produce physician assistants who are committed to the service of the human person through the skillful, compassionate, and ethical provision of health care within the context of the Catholic Marianist tradition.

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