University of Nevada, Reno announces new Physician Assistant Studies Program
Program combats shortage of Nevada healthcare providers and improves healthcare access

RENO, Nev. - (June 15, 2018) — With Nevada ranking No. 48 for number of physicians per capita according to a 2017 report, "Health Workforce Supply in Nevada," physician assistants are playing a critical role in meeting northern Nevada and the state's expanding healthcare needs. Demand for PAs is expected to grow by nearly 40 percent nationally over the next 10 years, (U.S. News and World Report).

The University of Nevada, Reno School of Medicine (UNR Med), in partnership with Renown Health, today announced a new Physician Assistant (PA) Studies Program to meet the growing need for more healthcare professionals locally and statewide. The first class of 24 PA students begins instruction on July 2, 2018 at the University of Nevada, Reno Redfield Campus. The 25-month long full-time master's degree program is the first such program in the Nevada System of Higher Education and supports the Educated and Healthy Citizenry priority outlined in Governor Brian Sandoval's Strategic Priorities.

Students will take academic and clinical courses, clinical skills training and supervised clinical practice, resulting in a Master of Science in Medicine Physician Assistant Studies degree. Upon completion, PAs are qualified to conduct physical exams, diagnose and treat illnesses, order and interpret tests, write prescriptions, perform and assist in surgeries.

UNR Med and healthcare partner, Renown Health, introduced the PA Studies Program, faculty and its inaugural class today with a news conference and public open house.

Two UNR Med PA Studies Program students, Amanda Wong and Ryan Wong, are a sibling duo who were raised in northern Nevada and are excited for not only the availability of a PA Studies Program at UNR Med, but to go through the program together and stay in Nevada, working in primary care.

"I am choosing to attend UNR Med for PA school because I want to give back to the community that has provided me with so many wonderful opportunities," said Amanda Wong. "UNR Med's PA Studies program's mission and vision will help train me to become a compassionate, skilled, primary care PA who is able to strengthen health care in our community."

Amanda's brother, Ryan Wong said the average PA applicant applies to seven to eight programs. "While I am grateful to have received offers from other programs in California and Colorado, I chose UNR Med's PA Program because of the mission and commitment to serving the underserved communities in Nevada.

"What distinguishes the PA program at UNR Med from others is the emphasis on providing care for diverse patient populations in underserved communities in Nevada. There are populations throughout Nevada that need help. Health disparities exist in our community and in rural, frontier and urban areas, from Tahoe to communities in Las Vegas. I truly believe the training I receive though the PA program will allow me to be a competent, compassionate, and effective provider in any setting for our state," said Ryan Wong.

The School of Medicine joined forces with [Renown Health](#), to provide program development, start-up and clinical training. Longtime supporter William N. Pennington Foundation has provided critical facility, equipment and technology support.

"UNR Med's new PA Studies Program is a testament to the unwavering commitment of our School of Medicine, our University, our community partners and our state over the past four years to make a PA Studies program a reality at UNR Med," said University of Nevada, Reno School of Medicine Dean, [Thomas L. Schwenk, M.D.](#) "This high impact program is positioned for success under the leadership of Founding Director, [Brian Lauf](#), PA-C, and the exemplary faculty, students and curriculum that will produce PAs who are prepared to enter practice immediately after graduation."

The new program is key to UNR Med and Renown Health's joint focus on training the next generation of healthcare providers and addressing the shortage of providers in the region. Before the partnership, the closest PA program was located in Sacramento, California.

"This collaboration is another example of how Renown and UNR Med work together to ensure access to high quality care for our growing community," said Doug Merrill, M.D., MBA, MA, executive vice president, chief medical and academic officer at Renown Health. "PAs are important assets as they work in our medical teams to provide excellent care to the patients of northern Nevada, which is why we're excited this program is here to keep highly skilled providers in Nevada."

A particular focus of the program is attracting and training qualified candidates from rural and urban underserved communities in Nevada. Data show medical professionals tend to stay and practice within the communities where they train further demonstrating the long-term impact the program will have on increasing available healthcare professionals in rural and urban areas.

For more on the University of Nevada, Reno School of Medicine PA Studies Program visit https://med.unr.edu/physician-assistant. The UNR Med PA Studies Program received Accreditation-Provisional by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education ([ARC-PA](#)). Information about Accreditation-Provisional status and what that means to a PA program is available at https://med.unr.edu/physician-assistant/accreditation

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The [University of Nevada, Reno School of Medicine](#) is a community-based, research-intensive medical school with a statewide vision that has served Nevada for nearly 50 years as its first public medical school. UNR Med's vision is a healthy Nevada, supported by our mission: establishing excellence in medical education, medical care, research and community engagement, while committing to a culture of respect, compassion and inclusion. Through targeted growth and investment in research, clinical services, education and outreach, UNR Med is a resource for improving healthcare regionally and across the country. For more information, visit: med.unr.edu.

[Renown Health](#) is a locally governed and locally owned, not-for-profit integrated health care network serving northern Nevada, Lake Tahoe and northeast California. Renown is one of the region's largest private employers with a workforce of more than 5,700. It comprises three acute care hospitals, a rehabilitation hospital, skilled nursing, the area's most comprehensive medical group and urgent care network, and the region's largest and only locally owned not-for-profit insurance company, Hometown Health. For more information, visit renown.org.

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