

# MCR Health Celebrates Launch of Inaugural Podiatry Residency Program, Expanding Graduate Medical Education in the Region

*Collaborative residency program brings together MCR Health, LECOM and regional hospital partners to train future podiatric physicians.*

BRADENTON, FL, UNITED STATES, July 7, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- MCR Health proudly

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This residency program reflects our commitment to expanding access to care while strengthening the physician workforce for generations to come.”

*Dr. Melvin B. Price, President and CEO*

celebrated the launch of its inaugural Podiatry Residency Program during a Welcome Dinner held on June 29, officially welcoming its first class of residents and marking a historic milestone for the organization and the future of healthcare in Southwest Florida.

The program, developed through a collaborative partnership between MCR Health, the Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine (LECOM) School of Podiatric Medicine, Manatee Memorial Hospital, HCA Florida Blake Hospital, and Lakewood Ranch Medical Center, represents

a significant investment in physician education and workforce development. The partnership provides residents with a comprehensive training experience across outpatient, inpatient, and surgical settings while expanding access to high-quality podiatric care throughout the region.

The inaugural class, Dr. Juleona Villaneuva, Dr. Rachel May Philip, and Dr. Kush Jani officially began their training on July 1, working alongside experienced physicians and multidisciplinary healthcare teams while caring for patients across the communities served by MCR Health and its clinical partners.

"As healthcare continues to evolve, investing in the education and development of future physicians has never been more important," said Dr. Melvin Price, President and CEO of MCR Health. "We are grateful to LECOM, Manatee Memorial Hospital, HCA Florida Blake Hospital, and Lakewood Ranch Medical Center for partnering with us to make this vision a reality."

"Manatee Memorial Hospital is proud to partner with MCR Health in launching this new Podiatry Residency Program," said Colin Weaver, Interim CEO of Manatee Memorial Hospital. "By helping

train the next generation of podiatric physicians, together we are building a stronger healthcare workforce while expanding access to high-quality specialty care for the patients we serve. This collaboration reflects our shared commitment to improving the health of our region for years to come."

Unlike traditional residency programs that are typically sponsored by large academic medical centers, MCR Health is among a select group of Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) nationwide to sponsor a surgical residency program. The initiative reflects the organization's continued investment in graduate medical education and its mission to improve health outcomes by training physicians in community-based care.



Inaugural Podiatry Residency Class - Dr. Juleona Villaneuva, Dr. Rachel May Philip and Dr. Kush Jani with Dr. Melvin Price, President and CEO, Dr. Monica Rider, Chief Medical Officer, and Dr. Chrisbel Dafeamekpor, Program Director

The June 29 Welcome Dinner brought together physicians, healthcare executives, board members, faculty, community leaders, and partners to celebrate the program's official launch and recognize the inaugural residents as they begin this next chapter of their professional careers.

The residency program is the result of years of planning and collaboration led by MCR Health's Graduate Medical Education team, including Dr. Monica Rider, Chief Medical Officer; Sharon Hong, Director of Graduate Medical Education; and Dr. Chrisbel Dafeamekpor, Program Director, working alongside faculty and leadership from LECOM and each of the participating hospital partners.

"This program demonstrates what can be accomplished when healthcare organizations and academic institutions work together toward a common goal," said Dr. Monica Rider, Chief Medical Officer of MCR Health. "By combining the strengths of community-based care, academic excellence, and hospital-based clinical training, we are preparing the next generation of podiatric physicians to deliver compassionate, high-quality care while addressing the growing healthcare needs of our communities."

Graduate medical education remains one of the most effective strategies for addressing physician shortages across the country. Studies consistently show that physicians are more likely

to establish their practices near where they complete residency training, making programs like this one an important investment in the long-term health of the region.

The launch of the residency program also reflects the shared commitment of LECOM School of Podiatric Medicine, Manatee Memorial Hospital, HCA Florida Blake Hospital, Lakewood Ranch Medical Center, and MCR Health to advancing medical education, strengthening clinical collaboration, and ensuring patients throughout Southwest Florida continue to have access to exceptional healthcare for years to come.

#### About MCR Health

MCR Health is a not-for-profit healthcare organization providing comprehensive primary, specialty, behavioral health, pharmacy, and community-based healthcare services to patients across Manatee, Sarasota, and DeSoto counties. Through more than 25 health centers, specialty practices, pharmacies, mobile care units, and graduate medical education programs, MCR Health is committed to improving health outcomes, expanding access to care, and building healthier communities.

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