



## Medical students to explore healthy aging and mental health solutions

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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(January 19, 2024 | PEORIA, Ill.) – Like many communities, the older population in Streator, Illinois has grown – so much so that 20% of residents in the north central city are 65 or older. So, it’s no surprise that healthy aging ranked as the fourth-most important health issue in the most recent [Community Health Needs Assessment](#). There’s also a big concern about mental health which ranked second for identified health needs in the 2022 survey.

That demographic information and identified health priorities will help guide the innovation sprint by medical students from the University of Illinois College of Medicine, Peoria (UICOMP). They’re part of the [EquIMED program](#) – a four-year elective track for medical students. During an innovation sprint, third and fourth year students are challenged with developing an innovative tool or approach to solve a fundamental problem.

Starting February 12, five EquIMED students will be spending a week in Streator to learn first-hand about health challenges for those 65 and older. They will then pair up to develop solutions.

“We have medical providers and social service agencies under one roof at the [Center for Health in Streator](#) so there are opportunities for collaborative solutions,” says Community Health Engagement Program Manager Ellen Vogel.

“In the past, we have asked medical students to help us with obesity, food insecurity and teen mental health, but there is a growing concern about our older population facing physical, but equally as important, mental health challenges.”

Vogel points out the second-most populous city in LaSalle County, Streator does not have an adult day center or a senior center.

The EquIMED program was developed with an understanding that the challenges facing rural and under resourced communities across the globe are the same as in the U.S. and so solutions developed could help regionally and globally.

“As many as 1.5 million Illinois residents lack access to health care because they live in rural and/or medically underserved communities. We need to come up with solutions that provide more access, but also that can support those residents in between appointments,” says John Vozenilek, MD, vice president for Innovation & Digital Health, OSF HealthCare. Dr. Vozenilek who is also a UICOMP professor and course director adds, “The University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria EquIMED track offers a four-year curriculum and the opportunity to expose future medical providers to patient populations with unique struggles as well as strategies for how to create innovative solutions for them.”

EquIMED students are learning about innovation through hands-on work, small group sessions, simulations, online lectures, lunch and learns, dinner speakers, as well as from instruction by OSF Innovation experts who work at the [Jump Trading Simulation and Education Center](#), a collaboration between OSF HealthCare and UICOMP.

“The solutions generated by the students have the potential to offer real value, but the real value to the EquIMED students is the journey of discovery and what they learn through an iterative process to advance health equity innovation across environments where health disparities exist. They learn how to ask questions, communicate, document, think critically and research what’s already available and bring the best options forward,” explains UICOMP Program Coordinator Erica Litzsey, MS. “They can use the approach in the future whether they become physicians serving rural, urban or any type of community.”

## Additional Background

Some previous solutions from EquIMED students are being developed further in partnership with Bradley University:

- ***PeoriaFresh!*** - The software system allows food banks and local gardeners to collaborate and share produce.
- ***(Diabetes and Resourceful Testing (DART))*** - An app that uses community health workers to increase access to diabetes testing supplies so glucose levels can be measured at least once a week. It will also provide a dashboard with alerts to help individual patients better manage their glucose levels. Bradley and OSF are providing additional funding for both efforts through an [Innovation for Health](#) grant.

The diabetes management program was a solution proposed by students working in Uganda which has a problem with patients being able to access and afford diabetes testing supplies, particularly in communities with no hospitals or medical clinics. UICOMP has an ongoing relationship with a university in Uganda but due to unrest in the East African country, along with a U.S. travel ban, students won't be traveling there for their innovation sprint this semester. Erica Litzsey says EquIMED program leaders are looking for another university willing to collaborate to expand the global options for embedding students for future innovation sprints abroad.

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**OSF HealthCare** is an integrated health system founded by The Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis. Headquartered in Peoria, Illinois, OSF HealthCare has 16 hospitals – 10 acute care, five critical access, 1 transitional care - with 2,131 licensed beds throughout Illinois and Michigan. OSF employs nearly 24,000 Mission Partners across 150+ locations; has two colleges of nursing; operates OSF Home Care Services, an extensive network of home health and hospice services; owns Pointcore, Inc., comprised of health care-related businesses; OSF HealthCare Foundation, the philanthropic arm for the organization; and OSF Ventures, which provides investment capital for promising health care innovation startups. In 2020, OSF OnCall was established, a digital health operating unit, including a hospital-at-home. OSF OnCall delivers care and services when, where and how patients prefer to receive them. OSF HealthCare has been recognized by *Fortune* as one of the most innovative companies in the country. More at [osfhealthcare.org/](https://osfhealthcare.org/).

**OSF Innovation** was launched in 2016 and includes a multidisciplinary team that inspires, mentors and partners to transform care for patients and providers. With expertise in everything from ideation to commercialization, the division designs agile solutions, connecting everyday needs with inventive approaches and bold advances. More at [osfinnovation.org](https://osfinnovation.org).

**The University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria (UICOMP)** is one of three regional campuses of the University of Illinois College of Medicine. The Peoria regional campus educates 265 medical students and more than 300 physician residents and fellows annually. Additionally, it provides clinical care to more than 45,000 patients annually and conducts basic science, clinical and outcomes research. The College of Medicine is home to the Cancer Research Center, Center for Wellbeing, and is a collaborator in Jump Simulation. Learn more about UICOMP at <http://peoria.medicine.uic.edu>.