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Munson Healthcare Charlevoix Hospital Doctor Receives Prestigious Award from Michigan State University

CHARLEVOIX, MI – Dr. Andrea Wendling of Munson Healthcare Charlevoix Hospital was recognized by The Michigan Center for Rural Health with the Professional of the Year award at its Michigan Rural Health Conference earlier this month.

Dr. Wendling is a well-respected rural family physician at Boyne Area Health Center (a service of Munson Healthcare Charlevoix Hospital) and is director of the Rural Health Curriculum for Michigan State University's College of Human Medicine. She has received numerous other awards including the Arnold P. Gold Humanism in Medicine Award in 2015, MSU-CHM's Outstanding Community Volunteer Faculty award in 2012, and the American Academy of Family Physician's Pfizer Teacher Development Award in 2000.

The Michigan Center for Rural Health (MCRH) was established in 1991 and is a crucial link in establishing rural health partnerships among organizations, health departments, hospitals, government and universities.

Dr. Wendling has become a staunch advocate for rural medical education, speaking around the country to other academic institutions who are interested in providing this type of program for their medical students. Dr. Wendling's work with MSU started in 2012 as the Director of Rural Medicine. With her passion for rural health, working with MSU was a natural fit.

"I grew up in the small village of Emmett in Michigan's thumb and realized firsthand the challenges that rural areas face when it comes to quality healthcare," said Dr. Wendling. "Attracting medical students who are interested in practicing in a rural setting has always been difficult, especially in Michigan. Rural populations are our largest medically underserved group in the nation. Finding those students interested in rural medicine and giving them opportunities to train in rural settings is the best way to recruit to these areas."

Under Dr. Wendling's leadership, MSU's rural training program has expanded to include students in Northern and Mid-Michigan as well as those on the original campus in the Upper Peninsula. The program's medical students learn about rural medicine over and above their normal medical school training. They spend two years in East Lansing or Grand Rapids and then during their third year, they relocate to rural communities all over Michigan for practical, hands on experience.

"During rural placements, medical students receive clinical hands-on training. Through the program, they also work with our rural communities. They work with the local Chamber of Commerce, attend community events, work in the Public Health Department, conduct research, and design a public advocacy project," said Dr. Wendling. "With less than ten percent of today's medical students expressing an interest in practicing in rural settings, it's important to provide high quality training experiences."

"This program works because we have great hospitals and doctors to partner with. They consistently go over and above what is required and offer great experiences for our students. The rural hospitals often provide housing for the students, the doctors take these students 'under their wings' and give practical experience and clinical skills to meet the healthcare needs of rural Michigan," said Dr. Wendling. "Charlevoix Hospital in particular has made an investment in the lives of the students who have participated in the program, and that investment has paid off. We have had several students who gained experience here in Charlevoix return to practice as doctors once they graduated. It's very fulfilling to know the program is working."

The program produces a podcast twice a month called "This Rural Mission" which speaks to issues affecting rural healthcare and helps to keep the students and professors connected.

With 20% of Michigan considered to be rural and only 5-6% of its medical students coming from rural areas, accessing the pipeline from high schools and smaller colleges is more important than ever. "The program keeps getting stronger," said Dr. Wendling, "but there are real barriers. Attracting students to rural healthcare is challenging, but also rewarding."

When asked what receiving this award meant to her, Dr. Wendling smiled and said that her brother had gotten it exactly right when he told her that there are lots of awards out there, but it is unusual to receive the "right" award – the one you are really passionate about, from the people you're trying to help. She said it was both very humbling and validating at the same time.

About Munson Healthcare Charlevoix Hospital

Munson Healthcare Charlevoix Hospital is a 25-bed, critical access hospital located in Charlevoix, Michigan. Part of the Munson Healthcare system, the hospital was established in 1919 and serves Charlevoix and northern Antrim County residents as well as thousands of vacationers each year. For more information, visit munsonhealthcare.org/charlevoix.

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3 PHOTOGRAPHS INCLUDED

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