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In back row from left are Dr. Jessica Colwell, Dr. Rob Eptsein, Isaac Ballou, CEO Michael Maxwell, COO Karen Paulsen, Tammy Reid and Heidi Wilson; in front row from left are Courtney Kacouros, Jenalee Attwood, Margie Warren and Kate Ballou. (Jesse Major/Peninsula Daily News)

North Olympic Healthcare Network, OMC, Swedish team up on new residency program

Official: first-of-its kind program will have residents training in Port Angeles and could combat doctor shortage

JESSE MAJOR ([HTTP://WWW.PENINSULADAILYNEWS.COM/AUTHOR/JESSE-MAJOR/](http://www.peninsuladailynews.com/author/jesse-major/)) | Sun Oct 16th,
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PORT ANGELES — Through a new residency program, the North Olympic Healthcare Network, Olympic Medical Center and Swedish Medical Center are teaming up to

increase the number of doctors available in the area.

It's a first-of-its kind program on the North Olympic Peninsula, according to Michael Maxwell, CEO of NOHN. Starting this spring, two residents will spend a year at Swedish in Seattle, followed by two years at NOHN and OMC in Port Angeles.

Every year, two more residents will join the program, meaning by 2019, four residents will be actively training in Port Angeles at any given time, said Maxwell.

"We're trying to collaborate to work together to make sure people in this town have access to health care," he said. "One of the things we hated having to do was turning people away."

The first residents are scheduled to interview for their spots later this month but wouldn't start at Swedish until the spring.

"We're actively recruiting a new crop of physicians," said Maxwell, adding there's a number of doctors set to retire in the near future. "Studies show about 50 percent of doctors who train in a rural area stay."

While it's not the first residency program on the North Olympic Peninsula, it is the first program on this scale. Other programs have residents train in Clallam or Jefferson County for months at a time, he said.

Jefferson Healthcare in Port Townsend partners with the University Washington School of Medicine's Targeting Rural Underserved Track program to train UW residents, but they aren't in the community for two years.

There are other similar residency programs throughout the county as well, Maxwell said.

The longer-term residency program shouldn't only benefit NOHN and OMC, but the entire community, he said, pointing to long waiting lists to see a doctor.

The residents will split their time between NOHN and OMC, getting broad experience in medicine, said Eric Lewis, OMC's CEO. Between NOHN and OMC, the residents will train in family medicine, obstetrics, inpatient units, specialty clinics, general surgery, orthopedics, urology and other departments, Lewis said.

"This is a big deal for the medical community," Lewis said. "It helps us get more family practice primary care providers and creates a teaching environment."

Adding that the teaching environment moves local medical community "to the next level," he said, also helping recruit physicians.

The residency program comes at the heels of major growth from NOHN, which has doubled its staff since September 2015 as part of its goal to expand access to underserved people.

In September 2015, Family Medicine of Port Angeles transitioned into the nonprofit NOHN and increased its staff from 35 to more than 60.

"For the long-term health care workforce in this community, we needed to make a major change," Maxwell said.

That increase allowed NOHN to accept 2,500 new patients within one year, about 25 percent more patients than were accepted previously, said Maxwell.

"These are people who could not get access to care," he said. "If you talk to anybody, they'll say the waiting lists were a mile long."

NOHN is the first community health center in Clallam County, a distinction that allows it to accept federal grants to help fund operations.

A \$695,000 grant helped NOHN hire the extra staff. That grant is renewable as long as NOHN continues to meet federal requirements and shows there is still an underserved population in Port Angeles, Maxwell said.

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Michael Maxwell, chief executive officer at the North Olympic Healthcare Network, sees NOHN and Olympic Medical Center's upcoming residency program as a solution to the doctor shortage in Clallam County. (Jesse Major/Peninsula Daily News)



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