



JANUARY 2024

# MERGE News

The Quarterly Newsletter for the MERGE Collaborative



## A YEAR IN REVIEW

Just over a year ago, the Maine Rural GME Education Collaborative was launched with a generous grant from the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. The five objectives of this grant project are:

1. Create the first-ever statewide Graduate Medical Education (GME) Collaborative of the 4 ACGME Sponsoring Institutions with a collaborative structure for governance
2. Develop four rural elective rotation sites for resident physicians
3. Lead a new innovative “Rural Education Leadership Academy”
4. Launch a new online rural healthcare education database and learning platform
5. Establish a pipeline of programs including a rural research internship for current medical students and funding for healthcare research at the University of Southern Maine School of Public Health

We are proud to report on the progress toward each of these goals in this issue of the MERGE Newsletter. We thank all of our contributors and supporters around the state for helping the MERGE Collaborative meet its goals and provide excellent training opportunities for faculty and residents in our rural spaces.

## 2023 By the Numbers

- 22 Rural elective sites established
- 5 Completed MERGE rural elective rotations
- 10 Residents signed up for MERGE in 2024 so far
- 3 Faculty development sessions
- 10 Healthcare professionals engaged in rural education leadership training
- 4 Policy briefs for rural Maine completed
- 1 Learning platform launched

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## New MERGE Rotations

Farmworker Health with  
Maine Mobile Health -  
Washington County

Pediatrics with Franklin  
Memorial Hospital, Farmington

Mount Desert Island Hospital,  
Bar Harbor

- General Surgery
- Psychiatry
- Family Medicine - OB
- IM-Hospitalist
- Emergency Medicine

To see all rural  
elective offerings,  
visit our website [here](#)

# MERGE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL LEADING THE WAY

The MERGE Executive Council was formed at the beginning of 2023 with representatives in diverse fields from across the state. Importantly, leadership from the four ACGME Sponsoring institutions in Maine were represented, including Maine Medical Center (MaineHealth), Eastern Maine Medical Center (Northern Light Health), Central Maine Medical Center, and the Maine-Dartmouth Family Medicine Residency. The MERGE Collaborative has been the first opportunity for all four institutions to regularly work together on common GME goals. The council also includes current residents,

behavioral health experts, leaders in education, and representatives from Maine’s rural hospitals.

Key initiatives for the council have included building partnerships across the state to provide more diverse opportunities for learners, sharing best practices and knowledge to improve program efficiency, and exploring ways to expand access to care for patients in the state of Maine.

The MERGE Collaborative is proud to lead the way in creating new opportunities for Maine’s rural hospitals and patients.

## MERGE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

- Annie Derthick, PhD - Central Maine Medical Center
- Jim Jarvis, MD - Northern Light Health
- Thomas Gearan, MD - MaineHealth
- Kathryn Hoffmann, DO - Maine-Dartmouth FMR
- Ross Isacke, MD - Franklin Memorial Hospital
- Mike Murnik, MD - Blue Hill Hospital
- Brad Schimelman, MD - VA Medical Center - Togus
- Mummtaz Noori, MD - Central Maine Medical Center
- Lauren Struck, MD - Maine-Dartmouth FMR
- Yvonne Jonk, PhD - University of Southern Maine
- Jen Gunderman, MPH - University of New England
- Kathryn Norgang - University of New England
- Jessica Pollard, PhD - NASMHPD
- Tonya Bailey-Curry, LCSW - Mindfully Melanated
- Kalli Varaklis, MD, M.Ed - Grant PI - MaineHealth
- David McLellan, MBA - MERGE Program Manager

## MERGE CONFERENCE UPDATE

The 2023 MERGE Conference had been planned for late October. Sadly, due to the tragedy in Lewiston, the conference had to be postponed. The conference is now scheduled for March 28th, 2024. Everyone scheduled for the conference in October has been registered for the new date in March. If anyone is interested in registering for the new date, the registration is open and can be accessed through the MERGE website at:



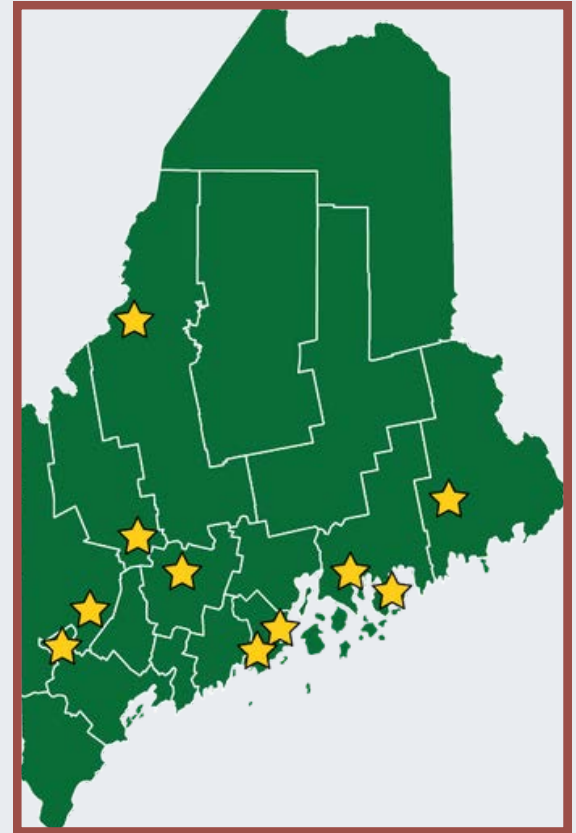
University of Maine, Wells Conference Center

[www.mergecollaborative.org/merge-annual-conference](http://www.mergecollaborative.org/merge-annual-conference)

## MERGE ELECTIVES BUILDING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

While the expectation from the Department of Health and Human Services was to establish four unique rural rotations in Maine, the MERGE Collaborative has already far surpassed that goal with the establishment of twenty-two rotation opportunities in ten different specialty fields. This exciting achievement is due in part to the wonderful physicians across rural Maine who are passionate about education and want to play a part in the learning experience for residents. A full list of electives can be found at <https://mergecollaborative.org/rural-resident-training/>

The MERGE Collaborative has worked to standardize, optimize and promote these new learning opportunities. By standardizing the process by which electives are built and promoted, it reduces pressure from our rural partners who are already stretched thin with an increasing case load. Our hope is that these residents will not only learn from our rural partners, but they will also contribute to the work effort and help support patients across the state.



MERGE has established 22 GME elective opportunities over 10 unique rural locations



## MAKING CONNECTIONS

Dr. Kelsey Hickey (left) of CMMC’s Family Medicine Residency had the opportunity to participate in a rotation at Bridgton Hospital with Hospitalist Dr. Zach Mueller (right) in October of 2023. After the two-week rotation, Dr. Hickey said, “I really loved my time in Bridgton. I got to work one on one with faculty, and really had autonomy in my medical decision making. We managed acutely ill patients as well as our rehab patients, and it gave a great experience to learn what rural medicine is really about.”

The positive feelings were mutual for Dr. Mueller as the attending physician, “Having Kelsey at Bridgton Hospital was great! She was a huge help in managing some busy days with a few very sick patients. This rotation is a great opportunity for residents to learn about providing hospital medicine in a totally different environment than most residencies provide. We look forward to having more residents join our hospitalists soon!”

## MAINE RURAL HEALTHCARE EDUCATION GRAND ROUNDS

### January 12th

“Medical Teaching in the Rural Outpatient Setting”

Presented by Dr. Kalli Varaklis, DIO Maine Medical Center and PI for the MERGE Collaborative



### February 9th

“Competency Based Evaluation and Assessment”

Presented by Dr. Annie Derthick, Associate Program Director for the Central Maine Medical Center Family Medicine Residency



### March 8th

“Billing for Things Learners Do (Or How Learners Can Help Your Bottom Line)”

Presented by Dr. Jim Jarvis, Medical Director of Clinical Education for Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center



2024 sessions will be on the 2nd Friday of every month from 12:00-12:45 PM



Open to the public at this link

[http://bit.ly/Maine\\_Rural\\_Healthcare\\_Education](http://bit.ly/Maine_Rural_Healthcare_Education)

## DOING THE ROUNDS FOR RURAL HEALTHCARE EDUCATION

Maine has many talented and qualified physicians who want to participate in graduate medical education (GME). However, some hesitate to get involved because they haven't taught before, or it has been some time since they were in residency. The MERGE Collaborative has worked to ensure that any physician interested in becoming a preceptor feels confident and ready to welcome residents into their practice. The year began with the development of a workshop called the “GME Slam.” This one-hour presentation was delivered to physicians at sites across the state hoping for a quick crash course in GME requirements.

As we go into 2024, the MERGE Collaborative is happy to announce the Maine Rural Healthcare Education Grand Rounds. This series of presentations will be presented virtually every month on the second Friday from 12:00 PM to 12:45 PM. This series will cover a range of topics for many healthcare professionals interested in hosting learners at their sites.



## RELA - THE NEXT CLASS OF LEADERS

One initiative of the MERGE Collaborative is to establish rural leaders in graduate medical education in rural settings. The grant created a unique Rural Education Leadership Academy (RELA) which supports 10 rural healthcare professionals to work as a cohort in education training and scholarly research. This group meets monthly for seminars on medical education and works to complete a scholarly research project. Many are identifying barriers to education participation and looking for solutions so more medical professionals can receive excellent training in rural Maine.

### RELA PARTICIPANTS 2023-2024

Jeannette Andrews, DO, OB/GYN, Western Maine OB

Peter Beaulieu, DO, Vascular Surgery, Northern Light Vascular

Emily Bohm, PA, Physician Assistant, Mayo Hospital

Gabriel Civiello, MD, Pediatrics, Franklin Community Health Network

Joseph Coffman, Clinical Nurse Educator, Mount Desert Island Hospital

Laura LaRosa, MD, Family Medicine, Western Maine Primary Care

Jeffrey Lynds, MD, Family Medicine, Franklin Community Health Network

Kristen Mazoki, DO, Psychiatry, Franklin Community Health Network

Ashley Mychak, DPM, Podiatry, Sebecook Valley Hospital

Ainsley Price, PA, Physician Assistant, Waldo County Medical Partners

## iHELP MAINE- A NEW RESOURCE FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

In a first-of-its-kind, the MERGE Collaborative has partnered with the Building-ME Network to launch a learning database specifically focused on the educational competencies for healthcare workers in rural and underserved parts of Maine. The “Interprofessional Healthcare Education Learning Platform for Maine,” (iHELP Maine) was launched in October of 2023 and is a free resource for all. The site was designed with Mainers in mind. In its first iteration, iHELP-Maine lets the user explore resources tied to critical healthcare issues identified by the Maine Community Health Needs Assessment reports. Users can also develop their teaching skills with resources organized into seven domains that align with the learning competencies of over twenty healthcare professions.

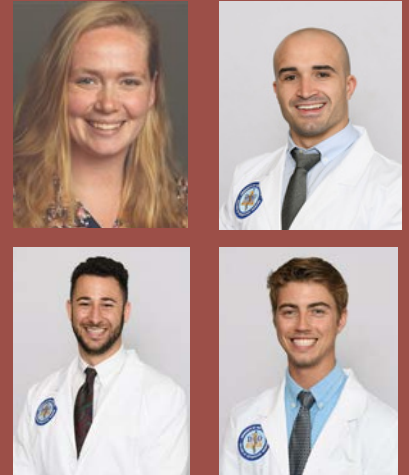
In 2024, the platform will have more developments including a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion competency resource page and curated learning modules based on unique rural patient scenarios.



# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM A NEW GENERATION

In 2023, the MERGE Collaborative welcomed its first four research interns. Three were medical students from New England University’s College of Osteopathic Medicine and one was from the Tufts University School of Medicine – Maine Track. All four interns were paired with a MERGE Collaborative GME Director and moved to a rural community in Maine during the summer months. During their time in these communities, the interns met with community leaders, healthcare providers, and other organizations to better understand the health needs of the community. After conducting interviews and research, all four interns, with support from MERGE directors, delivered a policy brief making suggestions on healthcare strategies that could support patients in unique rural communities.

All four policy briefs can be viewed on our MERGE Collaborative website at <https://mergecollaborative.org/publications-and-presentations/>



2023 Interns (clockwise) Abigail Deschiffart (Tufts), Ryan Hibbs (UNE), Rob Krulee (UNE), and Tyler Nussinow (UNE)



## SHOWCASING RURAL MAINE

Our state is world famous for its beautiful outdoors. Majestic ski mountains, ocean kayaking, and hiking across forests of white pine can be the best highlights of living and working in Maine. Thanks to new partnerships, residents who elect to do MERGE rotations can now enjoy free ski passes and complimentary entrance to Maine’s State Parks. What better way to spend a day off after a busy rotation than exploring the best outdoor opportunities in the world?

Any resident interested in receiving ski lift tickets or state park passes should contact program manager David McLellan at [david.mclellan@mainehealth.org](mailto:david.mclellan@mainehealth.org).

