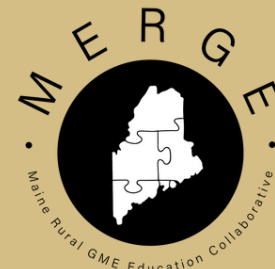


# MERGE News



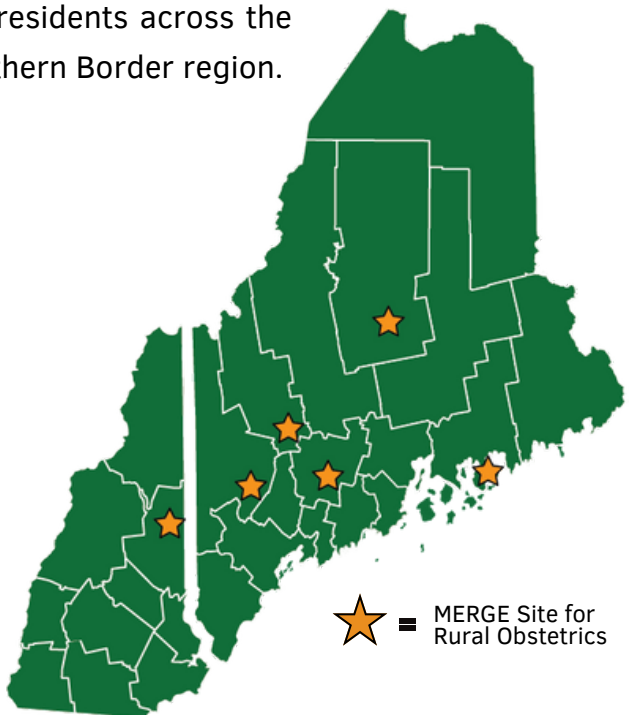
## MERGE IS AWARDED A NORTHERN BORDERS HRSA GRANT TO EXPAND RURAL OB ELECTIVE OPPORTUNITIES

In late September, the MERGE Collaborative was awarded \$667,330 from the Rural Northern Borders Health Resource and Services Administration (HRSA) to establish new rural obstetric training intensives. The grant is led by MERGE Principal Investigator Dr. Kalli Varaklis, who will also serve as Principal Investigator for this new HRSA grant. Says Dr. Varaklis, "This grant gives MERGE the great opportunity to leverage OB-specific education and rotations to focus on the need for more rural obstetric trained physicians in rural Maine." The grant ensures that the MERGE Collaborative will be able to sustain its ongoing rural elective program until at least September 2027.

The HRSA's Rural Northern Border Outreach Program is designed to promote the delivery of health care services to rural underserved populations in the region of Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont. MERGE will now have the opportunity to expand beyond Maine's borders and offer its first rotation in New Hampshire. All opportunities offered by the MERGE Collaborative will continue to be available to both Family Medicine and Ob/Gyn residents across the country, including those in our Northern Border region.

**Participating MERGE Sites for Rural Obstetrics**

- Stephens Memorial Hospital
- Franklin Memorial Hospital
- Northern Light Mayo Hospital
- Mount Desert Island Hospital
- Memorial Hospital, NH
- Maine-Dartmouth Family Medicine Residency



★ = MERGE Site for Rural Obstetrics

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## Newsletter Highlights

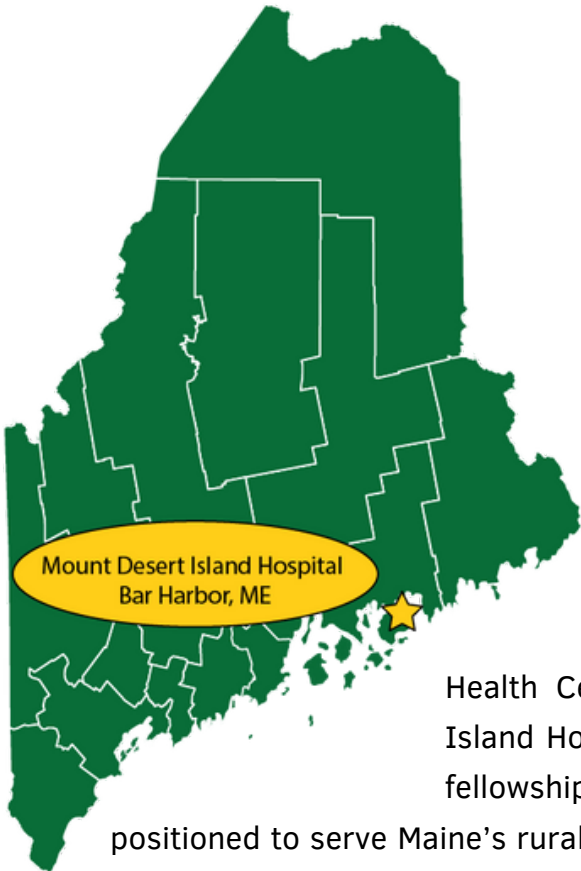
[Elective Rotation Spotlight: Mount Desert Island Hospital](#)

[Maine Rural Healthcare Education Grand Rounds](#)

## MERGE Rotation Specialties

- Family Medicine
- Internal Medicine
- Emergency Medicine
- Psychiatry
- Addiction Medicine
- Carceral Medicine
- Geriatrics/Hospice
- OB/GYN
- Pediatrics
- Cardiology
- General Surgery
- Vascular Surgery
- Anesthesiology

## SPOTLIGHT: MOUNT DESERT ISLAND HOSPITAL FAMILY MEDICINE WITH OBSTETRICS



Surrounded by the beauty of Acadia National Park in the town of Bar Harbor sits Mount Desert Island Hospital, a rural medical center serving Hancock, Washington, and Waldo counties in Maine. An important demographic of that rural region are women seeking obstetric care. While performing only approximately 60 deliveries each year, this hospital provides a critical need for Maine's rural residents. If not for Mount Desert Island Hospital, women in Maine's rural Downeast region would have to travel considerably further to receive the care they need.

Outpatient services such as prenatal and postpartum care are offered through Lisa Stewart Women's Health Center. Dr. Katherine Gassman serves as Medical Director of the Women's Health Center, as well as the Director of Obstetrics for Mount Desert Island Hospital. With training as a Family Medicine physician as well as a fellowship in Rural Family Medicine and Surgical Obstetrics, she is well-positioned to serve Maine's rural population. She also provides great insight for MERGE residents completing this rural elective rotation. Says Dr. Gassman, "It's exciting to show residents the breadth of what family medicine physicians can do in rural communities and the close connections they make with these rural communities."

Residents can work 3-4 days a week in clinic and spend time in labor and delivery if managing a labor patient. In the days following a delivery, the resident then participates in rounds with mother and newborn in the hospital. Dr. Mummtaz "Taz" Noori is a PGY3 resident from the Central Maine Medical Center Family Medicine Residency who had the opportunity to complete this unique rotation. Said Dr. Noori, "This rotation allowed me to fully immerse myself in rural medicine, providing invaluable insight into the unique challenges of healthcare in these communities."



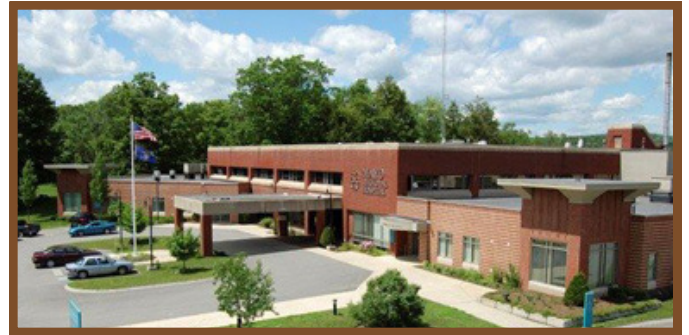
An overhead view of Mount Desert Island Hospital in Bar, Harbor, ME

Those interested in this rotation can reach out to MERGE Program Manager David McLellan at [david.mclellan@mainehealth.org](mailto:david.mclellan@mainehealth.org)

## HRSA GRANT - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The first step in developing this new Rural Obstetric Training Intensive is bringing together a consortium of providers across the region that will develop and administer these learning opportunities. The new Rural Obstetric Education Consortium includes physicians from:

- Stephen's Memorial Hospital, Norway, ME
- Franklin Memorial Hospital, Farmington, ME
- Northern Light Mayo Hospital, Dover-Foxcroft, ME
- Mount Desert Island Hospital, Bar Harbor, ME
- Maine-Dartmouth Family Medicine Residency, Augusta, ME
- Memorial Hospital, North Conway, NH



Northern Light Mayo Hospital (above) in Dover-Foxcroft, ME is one of the participating hospitals for the new Rural Obstetric Training Intensive

This group of Family Medicine and OB/GYN physicians will oversee the development of the educational and curricular content and host residents in partnership with other consortium members. The group

**Continued on Page 4**

## UPCOMING MAINE RURAL HEALTHCARE EDUCATION GRAND ROUNDS

- November 8th, 12:00, **Models for Medical Education in a Clinical Setting** presented by Marc D. Kimball, MD FAAFP FASAM, Course Director for the Competency-Based Apprenticeship in Primary Care for the Tufts University School of Medicine – Maine Track
- December 13th, 12:00, **Rupture and Repair: DEI Accountability Measures in Practice** presented by Tonya Bailey-Curry, LCSW, DEI Consultant and Ombudsman for the MERGE Collaborative



Dr. Marc Kimball (left) and Tonya Bailey-Curry (right) will present the next two grand rounds.

All presentations are virtual and accessible from [http://bit.ly/Maine\\_Rural\\_Healthcare\\_Education](http://bit.ly/Maine_Rural_Healthcare_Education)

- More information about our Grand Rounds speakers can be found on our website at: <https://mergecollaborative.org/maine-rural-healthcare-education-grand-rounds/>



## HRSA GRANT - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

will have two co-chairs, Dr. Jeannette Andrews from Stephen's Memorial Hospital and Dr. Kathryn Hoffmann from the Maine-Dartmouth Family Medicine Residency. Dr. Andrews is an OB/GYN physician and Dr. Hoffmann is a Family Medicine physician who practices full-spectrum family medicine, including obstetrics. "Family medicine physicians train to provide comprehensive healthcare across settings and over the lifespan, so they are well positioned to help address the gap in obstetrical care within rural communities. Their skillset extends beyond the delivery room, enabling them to care for medically complex and vulnerable patients and offer ongoing care to the maternal-child dyad and the family unit. Supporting family physicians to handle management of pregnancies and deliveries within the scope of their practice and building strong partnerships between FM/OB and OB/GYN physicians can increase access to specialty care in rural communities by allowing OB/GYN physicians to focus on higher-risk patients and surgical procedures."

In addition to the consortium's expertise, the new curriculum will be informed by patient feedback from a series of rural patient focus groups. Says Dr. Varaklis, "Patient insights will be invaluable in our training of residents and also in how we train our faculty." Focus groups will be arranged across all six partnering hospitals during the first half of 2025.

This new initiative would never be possible without the existing infrastructure of the MERGE Collaborative, funded by the State of Maine DHHS, which continues to provide high-quality elective rotations for resident physicians across the entire state. The hope is that further engagement in this critical area of need will improve health outcomes for all Mainers.



Dr. Jeannette Andrews of Stephens Memorial Hospital (top) and Dr. Kathryn Hoffman of the Maine-Dartmouth Family Medicine Residency (bottom) will serve as co-chairs of the Rural Obstetric Education Consortium