EXCELA HEALTH WELCOMES NEW PHYSICIANS TO LATROBE HOSPITAL FAMILY MEDICINE RESIDENCY PROGRAM

LATROBE, PA, August 7, 2017… Excela Health is pleased to welcome eight new physicians to its Family Medicine Residency Program, five with ties to Western Pennsylvania. Established in 1974, the three-year-program is accredited by the American Osteopathic Associate and the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education and affiliated with Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University and the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine (PCOM).

These physicians were among 1,950 applicants from allopathic and osteopathic schools looking to join Excela Health’s program, which is recognized by the National Committee for Quality Assurance at the highest level as a Patient-Centered Medical Home.

The new residents, whose training officially began July 1, will alternate among Excela’s hospitals as they advance through their clinical rotations. They will also be among the first residents to train at Excela Square at Latrobe when it opens in January 2018. The third floor of this new ambulatory care center is devoted to the Family Medicine Residency Program and will serve as the program’s hub.
It’s only natural that Zachary Ankney, MD, 31, would return to Excela Health for residency training. During the summer of 2013, he spent a month at Excela Health Latrobe Hospital as an Andrew D. Bagby Scholarship recipient. During that immersion experience, Ankney had an up-close look at the program which only solidified his career decision.

Prior to enrolling in medical school, Ankney spent hundreds of hours shadowing health care professions in numerous medical specialties in addition to working as an EMT for Citizens Ambulance Service in Indiana County.

Much of his career exploration came as a participant in Conemaugh Health System’s Mentoring in Medicine Program which paired the Somerset native with specialists in Cambria and Westmoreland counties. Favoring family medicine, Ankney was accepted into the Physicians Shortage Area Program (PSAP) at Jefferson. PSAP promotes the development of family physicians to provide care in rural areas like his home community.

Ankney believes family medicine can have the greatest impact on a patient’s overall health. “Family doctors provide three main services: medical treatments, patient education and social work assistance. The ability to perform these three services to assist with considerable improvements in the lives of many patients is what is motivating me to become a rural family physician.”

A graduate of Westmont Hilltop High School, Ankney has a solid foundation on which to build a medical career. He holds undergraduate degrees in secondary education (social studies and history) from the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown and biology from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. “Medical treatment and education go hand-in-hand,” he noted. “But there are occasions when patients may need assistance that is outside the expertise of the doctor. In this situation, the family physician plays the role of social worker to find the appropriate services for the patient. Possessing all these skills can help many patients to see a large improvement in their health.”

He is assigned to Saltsburg Family Medicine.
A lifelong student of Tae-Kwon-Do, John Kopko, DO, 28, sees clearly the extraordinary capabilities of the human body, and for a time considered a career in physical therapy, having used karate as part of this own fitness regimen. A biology major at the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg, Kopko served as an instruction for his karate dojo and formed a martial arts aerobics class on campus.

When a personal illness compromised his ability to pursue these pastimes, he was forced to examine a health care career from a new perspective – that of a patient. What the Greensburg native came to appreciate was the interconnectivity among a medical diagnosis, physical rehabilitation and practical strategies for living.

The challenge of balancing medical education and the recovery process affirmed his commitment to Family Medicine. By working with a primary care physician to optimize his own health, Kopko has been able to achieve two meaningful and demanding goals: graduation from Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine this spring and his second degree black belt in Taie-Kwon-Do.

Kopko believes his personal journey will be beneficial in caring for patients, and hopes to pursue fellowship training in neuromuscular medicine following residency.

He is assigned to Norvelt Familiy Medicine.

It was during a clinical rotation in his third year of medical school at West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine that David Yuna, DO, 27, found a role model for rural medicine. Assigned to a physician who had been in practice for 40 years within the small West Virginia town, Yuna saw firsthand the value of establishing a strong doctor-patient relationship that could last a lifetime. What he learned in this career-defining assignment will guide his professional practice forever.
A Bridgeville native, Yuna began his undergraduate studies at San Diego State University before transferring to Bethany College in West Virginia in preparation for medical school closer to home.

Yuna’s interest in sports as spectator, baseball player and instructor provide a natural tie to community involvement. He plans to continue coaching youth teams as a way to grow closer to those he hopes to serve as a family physician.

He is assigned to Mountain View Family Medicine.

Growing up in Altoona, Catherine Kananen, DO, 27, knew her friends and family often had to travel hours to see a physician. That lack of access to care was a motivator for Kananen to participate in an AmeriCorps Community HealthCorps program, bringing medical care to the underserved, including those of diverse cultures and socio-economic background. This experience fueled a passion for primary care and ultimately changed her world view.

Kananen double majored in biology and immunology and infectious disease at Pennsylvania State University. These served as a springboard for medical school at Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine, where each clinical rotation left her craving more and more interactions with patients – not just occasionally, but throughout their life.

Kananen’s creativity and social conscience find an outlet with The Memory Project, an international program that creates individualized portraits for orphaned, abandoned, neglected or abused children of various countries. While she cannot provide a physical healing touch, she has created nearly 30 charcoal portraits of children from El Salvador, Sierra Leone, Mexico, Rwanda, Nepal, Paraguay and Romania.

She considers it a privilege to serve underrepresented communities and looks forward to every opportunity to advance her love of medicine as a physician, a partner and an advocate for those who need help.

She is assigned to Latrobe Family Medicine.
Ryan Semko, DO, 27, got a true taste for family medicine as a 9-year-old, when his playground daydreaming resulted in a close encounter with a metal swing. The vivid memory of a frantic car ride, a bloody lip, the possibility of stitches and the calm environment in the doctor’s office colored his view of health care forever. The youngster found himself pledging to become a physician just like the one who helped him – one who cared more about his patient’s well-being that the end of office hours, one who projected quiet confidence in a frightening situation, and one who calmly conversed with the entire family to be sure they understood continuing self-care.

Years later, Semko would become part of his grandmother’s care team as she battled kidney disease and dementia. In this new role, he was both a caregiver and a patient advocate, giving him greater insight into the complexities of health care. Once again, he was evaluating the doctor-patient relationship and determining what he could incorporate into his future practice.

An Ebensburg native, Semko received his undergraduate degree from Shippensburg University and his medical degree from the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. While at PCOM, his understanding of the health needs of the elderly deepened while providing continuity care in a nursing home setting.

Naturally curious, Semko is a person of diverse interests, including art, sports, cooking, traveling and outdoor activities. All will serve him well as he develops relationships with the patients he is assigned at Norvelt Family Medicine.

Margaret Karcher, DO, 27, started out studying foreign languages in college, intent on mastering French and Spanish. Having traveled extensively throughout Latin American and Europe, she was driven by the idea that to help others she would need to be able to converse with them. Though she had studied aboard in Dijon, France, it wasn’t until she visited Nicaragua for an immersion experience that she found herself not only absorbed in the language and the culture, but in the very lives of people. A sightseeing trip included an unanticipated stop in a rural pharmacy where she improvised first aid care
following a moped accident. A day later she knelt in the street by an injured man who would later succumb on the way to a hospital. And before the trip was over she was aiding a fellow kayaker who had been attacked by a howler monkey. Mulling over these experiences on the plane home she resolved to pursue training that would enable her to step up to these challenges.

These experiences spurred her interest in rotations in neonatal intensive care and emergency medicine. But more than these episodic instances of care, Dr. Karcher is looking for the type of doctor-patient relationships that develop into lifetime partnerships.

A graduate of Saint Mary’s College in Notre Dame, Ind., she received her medical degree from the Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine where she met fellow resident John Kopko, DO. The pair, now engaged, are both part of the Excela Health Latrobe Hospital Family Medicine Residency Program. Like her fiancé, Dr. Karcher shares a love of endurance pastimes and has completed two marathons. She is assigned to Saltsburg Family Medicine.

Even though his doctor recommended that he open a taco stand instead of becoming a doctor because he would make more money that way, Michael Nieto, MD, 31, gives credit to that physician in his small South Texas town for instilling his love of medicine. That female doctor is part of his life’s fabric, diagnosing his pneumonia when he was 5, treating him when he injured his hand in college and earning his respect and trust along the way.

A graduate of the University of Texas and its Honors Premedical Academy in collaboration with Rice University and Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, he remained at Baylor for medical school.

He completed the first year of a general surgery residency at Baylor, and found himself looking forward to the clinic visits post-op, not the operating room experience itself. Beyond the surgery itself, he wanted to know outcomes, which led to a two-year postdoctoral research fellowship at Texas Children’s Hospital. Both opportunities only solidified his decision to return to family medicine as a career path.
Assigned to Mountain View Family Medicine, Nieto relocated to Pennsylvania with his wife, a pediatrician who also trained at Texas Children’s. She is practicing in Washington County.

**Yaw Fordjour, DO**, 33, has taken advantage of every opportunity available to prepare himself to one day return to his home nation of Ghana as a physician. The first person in his family to consider such a possibility, Fordjour has been on a journey that crosses many continents and career options.

With scholarship assistance, Fordjour first studied engineering at Jacobs University in Bremen, Germany. His education in the environmental engineering/biological sciences continued at the University of Alberta, Canada, with both degrees pointing him toward medical school. While in Canada he worked for a mobile tutoring service, then as a laboratory technician for Cardinal Health in Hartford, Conn., while planning for the next steps on his path.

Fordjour completed a stint in the U.S. Army National Guard, stationed in Martinsville VA., which overlapped with his first two years of study on the Virginia campus of Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine. His tutoring skills and his clinical experiences have already benefited his homeland, where he has volunteered in programs that augment Africa’s teacher shortage and support public health initiatives.

Finding joy and satisfaction in caring for patients of every age and situation, Fordjour believes his varied experiences will make him “shovel ready” to return to his community.

He is assigned to Latrobe Family Medicine.