

Gundersen Lutheran Health System, LaCrosse, WI

Gundersen Lutheran Medical Foundation
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The Gundersen Lutheran (GL) Health System represents a multispecialty group practice with a 19-county referral area. This program has long been a mainstay in the surgical training of residents who largely pursue careers in rural settings. Among the 52 graduates of the five-year surgical residency program since it began in 1974, 40 percent elected to practice in towns with a population of less than 15,000. Currently, 49/52 graduates (three awaiting exams) have earned American Board of Surgery certification.

Because the only surgical specialty to sponsor a residency at GL is general surgery, residents are prepared for a full general surgical practice as well as competitive fellowships. Surgical residents work with attending staff in the surgical specialties—orthopedics, neurosurgery, otolaryngology, burn surgery, plastic surgery, cardiothoracic surgery, and urology—in a one-on-one training setting. In addition, residents perform 25 cesarean sections and 20 hysterectomies, plus gynecologic oncology cases, over two months during the third year of residency.

Residents complete a high-volume endoscopy rotation over two months that leads to the completion of more than 150 colonoscopies and 50 upper gastrointestinal endoscopic procedures.

The PGY-5 residents at GL lead the Chief Resident Surgery Service where they are in charge of their own patients with dedicated outpatient and protected operative time to facilitate their transition into clinical practice. The chief residents are in charge of all aspects of patient care during this experience, which includes patient selection, preoperative evaluation and testing, operative management and postoperative care. Patient continuity is afforded through this opportunity. In addition, the chief year can be adjusted to facilitate exposure to anticipated practice patterns (endoscopy, C-sections, etc.) following graduation.

Elective rotations in rural surgery are available at regional sites with populations of less than 8,000 during PGY 3 or 4. The residents who pursue these rural surgery experiences live in the community they serve and take call with the attending surgeons at the local hospitals. These residents assume responsibility for the care of all surgical patients, including nutrition and critical care needs. In addition, for those residents who have already decided to pursue a rural surgical career and know where they want to practice, the program has made arrangements for electives to be performed at the chosen institutions.

Additional elective opportunities that prepare surgery residents for rural opportunities include an international rotation and opportunities through the GL Global Health Initiative, which is

working to provide sustainable relationships with underserved populations in Tanzania, Nicaragua, and the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

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