The Rural Physician Scholars Program, a medical school initiative in the state of Mississippi, aims to attract current and future medical school graduates to the practice of medicine in rural Mississippi communities in exchange for scholarship funding.

Each year in which a qualifying student receives the funding, around $30,000 per year, he or she must agree to work in a rural area in Mississippi.

The Clarion-Ledger, Mississippi’s largest newspaper, reports that based on figures compiled by the Mississippi Health Policy Research Center, “primary care doctors in 63 of Mississippi’s 82 counties have patient loads that are more than double the standard recommended by the Council on Graduate Medical Education.”

The dire need for primary care physicians in rural areas is a growing issue, especially in Mississippi, a state which routinely ranks as one of the unhealthiest and poorest states in the nation.

Similar programs have been enacted in Alabama and Maine, aimed at attracting medical school students to practice primary care in rural areas. In addition, the National Health Service Corps offers programs for loan repayment in exchange for practicing in NHSC-approved sites, usually hospitals and clinics located in rural areas.

However, the appeal of specialty medicine is still a main hurdle these types of programs must overcome. “A family doctor in rural Mississippi typically earns about $120,000 a year and works more than 40 hours a week. Meanwhile, a cardiologist in Jackson could make twice that working half the hours,” according to the Clarion-Ledger report.

This is certainly a progressive move by the Mississippi lawmakers and leaders in the medical community, one which is sure to have a lasting impact throughout the state and the nation.

For further reading, click here.