

New health director gears up for influx of students

Dr. Tom Ryan, the new health center director, cites tailoring services to different groups as key to health care

By Ayisha Yahya
News Editor

As the new school year rolls around, Dr. Tom Ryan will continue his job as the new University health center director, except now he'll have thousands more students to keep healthy. After using the summer to observe the campus, attend meetings and "imitate a sponge," Ryan will have his hands full starting fall term.

Ryan has vast experience in university-based health centers and recently finished a 14-year tenure at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va. Apart from being attracted by the opportunities at the University, Ryan and his wife Kiva wanted to come West, where oceans and mountains are within easy reach.

"My wife and I like to hike and birdwatch," Ryan said, adding that he has a passion for biking.

While he enjoyed the relationships he built with his patients as a family practitioner in private practice, Ryan said he never looked back once he started working at schools, adding that he loves students' inquisitive nature and willingness to consider different options.

Ryan's responsibilities

Health directors have extensive responsibilities. While Ryan will see some patients, his main roles are to provide leadership and support for health center staff, to ensure smooth communication between different departments and with the wider campus, and to be a channel for ideas. He said he must also work to maintain morale and ensure that people are recognized for their work.

"(My goal) is really setting a climate and environment where people can enjoy coming to work and realize we're here for the same purpose, which is to take care of students," he said.

Ryan has already met with campus departments like the Office of Student Affairs to discuss issues that affect students. He added that the practice of medicine is a cooperative venture.

Saying he greatly believes in self-care, Ryan wants students to view the health center as a place they can turn to for health-related issues, even when they are not sick.

"I tend to be a big advocate, as I think everyone here is, of health promotion and wellness," he said.

Future projects

Ryan said he hopes to continue providing programs that educate students on wellness. One of his goals is to improve the health center's Web site to provide up-to-date information and links to valuable resources.

The health center already offers programs in collaboration with other campus groups on safe sex, smoking cessation and alcohol abuse. Ryan said the center could develop other topical programs that target specific groups.

"There are a lot of groups that have different needs, and we need to respond to that," Ryan said, citing international students as one example.

Ryan will also assist in preparing for the new health center expansion, a 10,000-square-foot addition to the current space, although the details of when the project will begin and where it will go still need to be worked out. When the construction is underway, Ryan said he wants to ensure that the health center is still accessible and comfortable for its staff and users.

Staff reactions

As for the health center staff, many workers are happy so far with Ryan's performance and demeanor.

Assistant Nursing Director Sharon Harbert described Ryan as very professional, accessible and self-assured.

"I believe he will carry on with the mission of the health center to improve the educational experience of the students here," she said, adding that she respected Ryan's efforts to gather as much information as possible about the University.

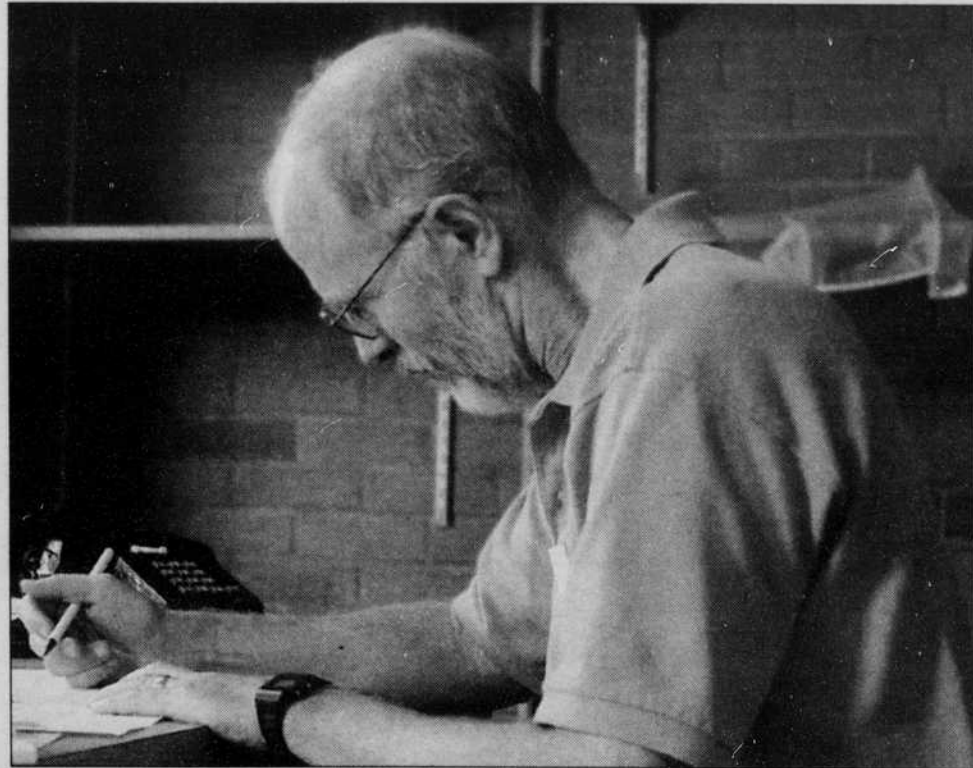
Medical Records Supervisor Pat McCormick has similar sentiments.

"He's hearing what we have to say," McCormick said. "He's taking the time to talk to everyone."

Ryan's ultimate goal is to serve students.

"We're here for students and we want to be sure that they understand that and know we're here," he said. "And we're not only here when they're sick."

Contact the news editor at ayishayahya@dailyemerald.com.



Dr. Tom Ryan, the new University Health Director, works to promote wellness education, and urges students to practice self-care and preventative health.

Jessica Waters
Photo Editor

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