

# Jennifer LeComte, DO

## Division Chief of General Internal Medicine, Rowan Medicine

All too often, children with chronic diseases and special needs find themselves falling through the cracks as they transition to adulthood. It's one of the reasons Jennifer LeComte, DO, is so passionate about offering her patients a unique – and comprehensive – type of care.

LeComte, who is board certified in both internal medicine and pediatrics, is committed to helping patients with special needs and those who have complex conditions originating in childhood transition into adult care.

"It made sense for me with the transition population that I should be able to care for both," says LeComte. "I have to know where some of my patients with chronic conditions come from in order to get them across the bridge into an adult world."

Oftentimes, patients, their parents and their caregivers find that the numerous resources available to them during the patient's childhood are harder to find as they begin to age. LeComte says there's also a lack of providers who specialize in helping patients and their families navigate that transition.



As the division chief of general internal medicine at Rowan Medicine, LeComte is leading efforts to develop a program that eases such a transition for patients. She's working to ensure that the program meets the varied needs of patients with a range of physical and developmental disabilities, such as autism, Down syndrome, congenital heart disease, cerebral palsy and sickle cell anemia, as well as childhood cancer survivors. The program also emphasizes wellness and preventative care in patients, instead of only centering around their diagnoses.

"I really emphasize preventative care and women's health. So, for instance, I might have a patient who's a young, 21-year-old woman with cerebral palsy. Other providers might not even think to send her for a pap smear because of her cerebral palsy. But she's still a woman with a uterus," she says. "My pediatric colleagues don't think about women's health as much as I do, because I'm an internist."

LeComte, who earned an undergraduate degree in biology from Loyola University, started her career at Bancroft, working with patients with intellectual disabilities. She also spent time at the University of Pennsylvania, where she provided genetic testing for hemophilia and breast cancer.

From there, LeComte attended medical school at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine and went on to work as a psych care specialist at CHOP before completing her residencies at Christiana Care Health System and Nemours Children's Health System.

She says these varied professional experiences fueled her passion for treating underserved patients with a continuum of accessible, high-quality care. LeComte, who also serves on the boards of Special Olympics Delaware and Rowan University's Unified Sports Program, also has plenty of personal reasons for being so passionate about what she does.

"I have a childhood friend who was born with his heart outside of his chest and celebrated his first four birthdays in the hospital. My grandmother was a volunteer with the special needs population, and my dad was a teacher at Elwyn, one of the oldest and largest care facilities and schools in the country that works with children

and adults with physical, developmental and emotional disabilities," says LeComte.

"I grew up not being afraid of this population, because I was exposed so early, and it broke down a lot of walls. I saw early on that there's plenty of opportunities for kids, but it just falls off in adulthood. I couldn't let go of that need."

"I believe in patients being at the center of their own care and being a partner with them."

LeComte has dedicated her practice to providing that care where patients need it most: right in their own communities.

"There's a lot of young people who are getting their specialty care outside of Philadelphia, at CHOP or Nemours in Delaware or St. Christopher's in Philadelphia," she says. "Our goal is to keep them in New Jersey for their primary care, so they don't have to travel to get what they need."

LeComte also notes that patients with special needs are more frequently outliving their parents and caregivers. She says it's one of the main reasons she also works to foster independence in her patients and encourages them to make their own health decisions.

"I have expectations that my patients can be autonomous at some level, though that level varies from patient to patient. Many providers my patients have seen before me didn't have expectations that the patient was going to participate in decision-making and self-management," she says. "I have those expectations, even in communicating directly with the patient. When I come into the room, I greet the patient first – even if the parents are there. Families really appreciate that."

"I believe in patients being at the center of their own care and being a partner with them," says LeComte. "Being a partner in someone's healthcare and connecting them to the resources so they can be functional in the community – I believe in that for everyone."