



August 14, 2009

White-coat ceremony continues despite AMA concern over infection

*By Doug Blackburn
DEMOCRAT Senior WRITER*

The 119 first-year students in Florida State's College of Medicine are likely to feel a closer connection to their profession after this evening, when the medical school holds its annual white-coat ceremony.

It comes at the end of their first semester, before the students begin rotations shadowing physicians in area medical clinics.

"It's a totally different thing to walk into a room with a white coat. It gives you more confidence," second-year FSU student Brett Howard said.

"You're still not a doctor," Howard added, "but it's one of those milestones."

The medical school is holding its white-coat ceremony at the same time members of the American Medical Association are debating a controversial proposal to do away with lab coats because they might be germ carriers and contribute to infections.

It's unlikely, however, that medical schools will abandon this much-anticipated rite of passage.

"To me, there's a difference between infection control and the ceremonies a medical school wants to do," said John Fogarty, dean of FSU's College of Medicine. "The white coat is really a symbol of the profession. It's a nice opportunity for us to get back to our roots and reaffirm our values."

In addition to receiving their lab coat, the students will also be administered a short oath focused on dedicating their lives "to the service of humanity."

Austin Henkel, president of the first-year class, expects to have 14 family members and his wife in the college's auditorium for this evening's ceremony.

"I'm very glad to be a part of it. You're no longer just a volunteer in a clinic — you're now a medical student," Henkel said. "The white coat is like a badge of honor."
