

Unconventional FSU medical school celebrates 10th anniversary at IRSC ceremony

By Jim Mayfield

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FORT PIERCE — In 2000, Florida State University bucked conventional wisdom to start an unconventional medical school. Thursday, the Treasure Coast contingent of the faithful gathered at Indian River State College in Fort Pierce to commemorate the school's 10th anniversary.

Linked via computer webcast with Tallahassee and five other regional, community-based campuses throughout Florida, a gathering of about 50 supporters met at IRSC's Brenda and Vernon Smith Center for Medical Education to celebrate the accomplishment and look to the future.

The FSU model differs from the conventional medical school/teaching hospital by deploying its third- and fourth-year students to six regional campuses from Pensacola to Sarasota, where they make rotations with practicing physicians and health-care providers on the front lines and in the trenches of health care.

"They're typically seeing here what they will be seeing in their careers," said Beth Strack, FSU College of Medicine Regional Campus Administrator in Fort Pierce.

"They're performing more procedures as well. For instance in surgery you might be (observing) four rows back at another school. Here, you're right there."

Students at the IRSC Fort Pierce campus work one-on-one with 200 Treasure Coast doctors who are on the school faculty, focusing on primary care, internal medicine, geriatrics and obstetrics-gynecology, Strack said.

The school's mission is to train patient-centered doctors to meet what many believe is a looming shortage of primary care physicians, she said.

Six classes have graduated since the school's inception, and 55 percent of the graduates have gone on to become primary care physicians, Strack said.

Speaking from FSU's main campus in Tallahassee, keynote speaker Darrell G. Kirch, president and CEO of the Association of American Medical Colleges, praised the school's "transformational change" in its approach to training the next generation of physicians.

"We have had revolutionary change that led to incremental change," Kirch said. "But you've shown the middle kind of change transformational change. The old order wasn't getting it done, so you made the big change."

Kirch said FSU's concept was a needed departure from the conventional, expert-driven method that couched medical education somewhere between vying for research grants and teaching hospitals that provided fees for service.

"Health care and medicine have not figured out that it is a team sport," Kirch said.

According the university, it graduated 30 students in its first class in May 2001. The school now enrolls 120 toward its full enrollment of 480 in serving Florida's elderly, rural, minority and underserved.



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