FSU College of Medicine fills local health care need

OUR VIEW
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As our national population grows and grays, the need for doctors and nurses will only increase.

And perhaps no more than in Florida, known for having a large retirement population. About 13.3 percent of the U.S. population is 65 years old or older, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. In Florida, that age segment is 17.6 percent.

That's one reason why the success of the Daytona Beach Regional Campus of the Florida State University College of Medicine is a major plus for the area.

The campus opened in 2007 with eight students. Now it has 40. Many of the program's graduates will stay right here, in the Volusia-Flagler region, practicing their medical specialties in a portion of Florida that needs more medical specialists.

The FSU College of Medicine's regional campus turned out 23 doctors in 2012. These doctors are likely be top-notch, because the FSU medical school is highly competitive. (For that class of 2012, the medical school received 2,369 applications. Only 117 students got in.)

Once the doctors graduate, some stay in the Daytona Beach area and work in a residency capacity at a Halifax Health department.

About 70 percent of doctors stay within 150 miles of where they served as residents, according to Luckey Dunn, dean of the Daytona Beach regional campus and a veteran family practice physician.

Dunn also said that the average age of general surgeons in the area is 53 with "nobody in the pipeline." The FSU medical campus is helping to increase the flow in the pipeline. That's a critical benefit for the region.

Nationally and locally, there are many health care-related challenges ahead of us. They are varied, from cost to the supply of nurses and doctors, particularly surgeons.

The government has seen the problem of too few doctors -- a problem that could cause the cost of health care to balloon.

Government funding for residency programs had been frozen for 20 years but two years ago some money was released for primary care and general surgery, which paid for some of the Halifax program.

Training new doctors is not cheap: It costs about $100,000 per resident to fund the program, including salary and benefits for the residents and funding for faculty.

The FSU medical campus in Daytona Beach was established because university and local leaders foresaw the challenge of adding more doctors to the region. The campus should be an important part of the area's health care scene for years to come.