

VOLUSIA

Dr. Luckey Dunn retires from Florida State University College of Medicine's Daytona branch

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At the end of the 20th century, most U.S. medical schools operated on a similar model: in the first two years, students are in the classroom or lab, then in the third and fourth years, they move into hospital or clinic rotations, working closely with residents and getting a more up-close look at patient care.

In 2001, Florida State University opened its College of Medicine, taking a different trail, blazed partly by the school's mission: to develop practicing physicians to address a shortage, particularly in underserved populations. In those third and fourth years at FSU, students would be distributed across the state into regional campuses, where their rotations would consist of one-on-one training with practicing physicians.

Robin Landy, who's on track to graduate next May and land in an OB-GYN residency, is finding her experience at the FSU branch campus in Daytona Beach gives her an advantage over students from the more renowned, research-focused schools.

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"We're on the interview trail right now for different residencies and I've had multiple, different programs that I'm applying for say, 'Oh we love FSU students. You guys are so experienced going in,' " Landy said.

This week, Landy and her fellow students bid farewell to the founding dean of the Daytona Beach campus, Dr. Luckey Dunn, who's retiring after 15 years. The school hosted a farewell lunch where nearly everyone except Dunn donned scrubs, punking one of his rules of professionalism — no scrubs unless you're in the emergency room or surgery.

Dr. George Bernardo, who's recently retired from his Port Orange family practice after nearly 30 years and has also served on the FSU-Daytona faculty since the school's inception, will be the new dean.

"Luckey was the perfect choice to be the founding dean here," Bernardo said. "He started a tradition of excellence that our students get at the Daytona Beach campus. He just did a perfect job of getting us to where we are today."

Pipeline delivers hundreds of doctors

Since 2007, FSU has graduated 259 students from its shared campus with Daytona State College. Fourteen alums are working in the Daytona area, said Andrea La Douceur, assistant director of the campus.

In addition to producing about 20 future medical residents annually, FSU trains classes of 10 physician assistants in Daytona Beach, while also operating similar campuses in Fort Pierce, Orlando, Pensacola, Sarasota and Tallahassee and maintaining smaller training clinics in Marianna, Immokalee and Thomasville, Georgia.

Dunn, a 68-year-old Daytona Beach native who was valedictorian of his Air Force Academy class in 1976, had a family medical practice in the area for about 15 years prior to taking on the dean position.

"I took the position, honestly, because I wanted to teach," Dunn said following the farewell lunch.

"What we're teaching our students is not the facts of medicine because those are going to change. ... One medicine works one year and three years later, it's proven not to work," he said. "What we're teaching students is the thought process. How do you think about things?"

Dunn said he aimed to produce doctors who treat every patient individually, without cookie-cutter meds or treatments, even if that goes against the wishes of bean-counting healthcare administrators.

“You want somebody to say, ‘Why are we doing this?’ And that makes it very difficult for (hospital) administrators to manage, but that’s what we’re trying to teach our students to do, is think independently, to challenge,” he said. “When you’re my patient, my job is everything is about you.”

Another fourth-year student, Priya Chattopadhyay, said she appreciates how the approach prepares her for the most common cases she will see.

"A lot of times when you're in medical school you get to see the academic side of how medicine is run, which is a little bit different than the private practice setting," she said. "We don't see the zebra cases as much. We see more of the bread-and-butter cases, so it gives you a great idea of the actual cases you're going to see after you're finished training."

Chattopadhyay, who was born in Halifax Health Medical Center in Daytona Beach but moved to California when she was 7, is pursuing a residency in internal medicine.

“And also what’s really nice about Daytona ... the faculty works so closely with us to see what our interests are,” she said. “So they try to get us into rotations that we know we might like. I knew I wanted to go into internal, so they tried to give me a really robust internal medicine rotation.”

Dunn has been a big part of establishing that culture, challenging students to follow their curiosity and engage with the community.

"He doesn't feel like our dean. He's more like the lead teacher in a sense," Chattopadhyay said. "I think he takes it on personally what he wants to teach us. What he wants to expose us to. He's very hands on and he's also so supportive."

Landy, who's Chattopadhyay's roommate, said the setting at the Daytona Beach campus is intimate.

"We love our classmates here, and the faculty and Dr. Dunn have done so much to make us feel at home and make us succeed in our rotations," Landy said.

“Our med school model here in Daytona is interesting because we work pretty much one on one with the faculty, which is pretty unique, so we get extra special look into medicine.”

New dean wants to 'pass along' knowledge

The incoming dean, Bernardo, started at FSU in 2007 as the clerkship director for family medicine and has served in different roles on the faculty ever since.

Even as he has seen patients for about 30 years, he has also taught medical students since the early 1990s, working with residents at Halifax Health and hosting students in his office.

“I always enjoyed that and have a love for that,” Bernardo said. “There’s no question, the transition, it’s different at this point in my life. I feel like I want to try to mentor students and maybe pass along some of the things that I learned along the way.”

Some of those bits of wisdom include preparing them for an immersive career.

“I try and impart to them that this is hard. This is difficult. ... The hours can be very long,” Bernardo said. “I just tell them it starts with their own attitude.”

Calls in the middle of the night should not disturb or upset new doctors, he said.

“They're asking for your help. They want your advice and you should approach it that way,” he said. “Part of your happiness is going to be your own attitude — how you look at things and how you approach things.”

At this point on their calendar, the fourth-year students are meeting with hospitals and healthcare facilities where they will do their three-year residencies. They will learn their fates in March, so their lives are a mix of passion and anxiety.

“It’s so exciting to be involved with them at this point (in their education),” Bernardo said. “There’s an energy or enthusiasm there that I don’t think you can create anywhere else.

“Their careers and lives are an open book at this point.”

The dean's job is to help guide them through this chapter. It's a responsibility Bernardo embraces, saying: “It is an honor to be part of that.”

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