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POLICY AND POLITICS

FSU and TMH aim to make Tallahassee a leader in medical research



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Published 6:00 a.m. ET June 13, 2022 | Updated 2:50 p.m. ET June 13, 2022

Leaders at Florida State University and Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare are laying the foundation to establish Tallahassee as a leading medical research and health care center with construction of the FSU Health Tallahassee Center at TMH.

FSU secured a \$125 million check from the Florida Legislature to build a five-story building with 130,000 square feet of research space and laboratories on what is to become a sprawling TMH campus between Midtown and Capital Circle.

TMH CEO Mark O'Bryant called the initiative a game-changer for Tallahassee and the delivery of health care across the Panhandle. He predicts it will result in a "dimension of research this community has never experienced.

"Think UF Shands, Emory, Moffitt, Vanderbilt. Those types of programs. We're moving down that pathway," said O'Bryant.

He credits FSU with securing the money from the Legislature for a plan the two institutions have yet to fully develop.

History of the project

TMH, FSU College of Medicine in discussions to establish 'academic medical center'

FSU hires former NIH scientist to direct research collaborations with Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare

FSU College of Medicine will mark its 20th anniversary in virtual celebration

FSU's and TMH's goals intersect at the hospital's interest in expansion as an academic health center – a free-standing teaching hospital affiliated with a university – and new FSU

President Richard McCullough's desire to increase funding for biomedical and clinical research.

The university and TMH have worked together closely since FSU's medical school was founded 20 years ago.

TMH is FSU's primary training and residency location for medical students. The two also collaborate on research, and share a few jointly funded positions.

Their plan now is to forge that partnership into a research alliance that attracts physician scientists to Tallahassee to advance clinical research and the delivery of health care.

"From the lab to the bed," is McCullough's description of how work at the health center will translate clinical research into practical application.

McCullough unpacked his bags in Tallahassee as FSU's new leader last August and was handed a legislative initiative developed in the waning days of former President John Thrasher.

This month he had a \$125 million down payment from the state in hand to make it a reality.

More about FSU College of Medicine

Teddy Bear Clinic helps ease children's anxiety about doctor visits

FSU, TMH and Apalachee Center plan new psychiatry residency program

Capital Medical Society Foundation awards \$45,500 in scholarships to FSU Med students

Partnership could train more doctors, attract top facility, McCullough says

McCullough explained to Senate President Wilton Simpson that if FSU and TMH had the money to take their partnership to what both he and O'Bryant call the next level, they would be able to train more doctors, attract better candidates to FSU faculty and TMH staff, and increase access to health care throughout the state.

Simpson said what he heard in McCullough's pitch was an innovative plan to transform Tallahassee into a health care hub where medications, devices and cutting-edge clinical care are created.

“All told, this investment will close the gap of quality health care in Florida’s Big Bend and help mitigate the shortage of critically-needed health care workers across our state,” said Simpson, a Republican candidate for Commissioner of Agriculture.

“The data shows us that FSU plays a key role in training the next generation of health care professionals with a high percentage of their graduates staying here in Florida to practice,” said Simpson.

Proponents said the health center also will benefit existing programs in high-need areas such as nursing, geriatrics, psychiatry and emergency medicine.

The plan Simpson and the Legislature bought into was developed in the Spring of 2021 when the governing boards of both FSU and TMH approved a strategic plan to work closely on the latter's expansion as an academic health center.

The two institutions agreed to jointly fund up to 30 positions for practicing physicians who want to do research. The physician scientists will hold FSU faculty positions and TMH practicing privileges.

McCullough predicts the opportunity to practice medicine and conduct research will be a powerful recruitment tool for both institutions.

"They can go after National Institutes of Health and federal funding for clinical research. It helps to attract generally, not always, but sometimes, the best physicians in the United States," said McCullough.

The expectation is the physician scientists will generate at least an additional \$40 million annually for medical research.

FSU and TMH are engaged in ongoing talks on what will be the new health center's areas of expertise.

O’Bryant said TMH’s strengths are in heart, vascular, neurological and orthopedic care and research.

McCullough mentions neurology and imaging, cardiology, and psychiatry as possible fields in which the partnership could excel and where it could place a FSU-TMH brand, similar UF Shands' association with cancer treatments and organ transplants.

But for now, McCullough said, FSU and TMH find themselves in a unique situation.

“We have the funding for the building, before we actually have an agreement,” he said.

More on FSU health care plans

FSU hires former NIH scientist to direct research collaborations with Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare

FSU, TMH and Apalachee Center plan new psychiatry residency program

FSU College of Medicine students get glimpse of practicing in rural communities

“We haven't figured out what's the sweet spot between FSU and TMH, in terms of what are going to be the areas that make the most sense,” said McCullough.

In the meantime, TMH has put aside up to 10 acres on its 155-acre campus on city-owned property for the new FSU health building.

When construction is completed within three years and it is fully staffed, the center is expected to generate \$200 million in economic activity annually, through its research and delivery of care.

“And when you think how those are new dollars coming into the community that's re-spent — typically a multiplier effect is three times — so the economic impact of this in the community, it's going to be 600-plus,” said O'Bryant.

A preliminary economic impact cited by the university and the hospital estimate the FSU Tallahassee Health Center at TMH will support more than 1,500 jobs annually.

During the construction phase 1,200 jobs will be created, and once completed, the center will employ 350 permanent research and health care professionals.

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