

Lee Memorial launching residency program for family physicians

By LIZ FREEMAN

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The Lee Memorial Health System is launching a residency program for family physicians with Florida State University to better address a persistent shortage of primary-care doctors in the region.

The residency program will be based at Lee Memorial Hospital and could admit its first class in July 2013.

The three-year program will admit six residents a year for a total enrollment of 18 residents at any given time, said Dr. John P. Fogarty, dean of FSU's College of Medicine.

Southwest Florida hasn't had any residency programs in the past, and it will improve the quality of care and help with recruiting new family physicians which are sorely needed in the area, said Richard Akin, board chairman of the non-profit Lee Memorial system.

"We have really been ripe in Southwest Florida for a residency program," he said.

Lee Memorial received a \$500,000 grant from the state Agency for Health Care Administration to help launch the program and could be responsible for up to \$300,000 a year in salaries and other program expenses, he said.

"(The program) is expected to break even in year four," he said, adding that is when it could pursue federal funding for graduate medical education after the program gains accreditation.

Medical school graduates are required to complete residency programs in their specialty for board certification, state licensure and to establish private practices.

The program expense to Lee Memorial in the early years is worth it, Akin said, considering studies show about 60 percent of physicians wind up establishing their practices in proximity to where they did their residencies.

"It is an investment in the community," he said

Akin also is chief executive officer of the Immokalee-based Collier Health Services, CHS, which forged a relationship with FSU's medical school in late 2007 for third- and fourth-year medical school students to do rural medicine rotations in Immokalee.

Fogarty said the existing relationship with CHS and Akin helped facilitate the negotiations for the residency program. At the same time, Fogarty said he knew Lee Memorial was talking to the University of Florida in Gainesville and the University of South Florida in Tampa about partnering for a residency program.

Ideally, some of the 30 to 35 medical students each year who do rotations in Immokalee at the FSU Isabel Collier Read Medical Center would be interested in doing their residency at Lee Memorial.

"I hope so," Fogarty said. "The key for us is that medical schools have been expanding in the last 10 years but 68 percent of my graduates had to go out of state (for residency programs)."

The state simply doesn't have enough medical residency slots and ranks 43 among all the states for residency slots based on the general population.

Lee Memorial will hire a program director and faculty will be recruited. Physicians on staff at the hospital are expected to express an interest in becoming faculty.

FSU is the institutional sponsor for three other residency programs at Tallahassee Memorial Hospital and in Pensacola's Sacred Heart Hospital.

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