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Med students are FSU's best weapon against the critics

Since the first stirrings of interest in adding a College of Medicine to Florida State University, the focus has revolved around the politics of developing the first new medical school in the United States in 20 years.



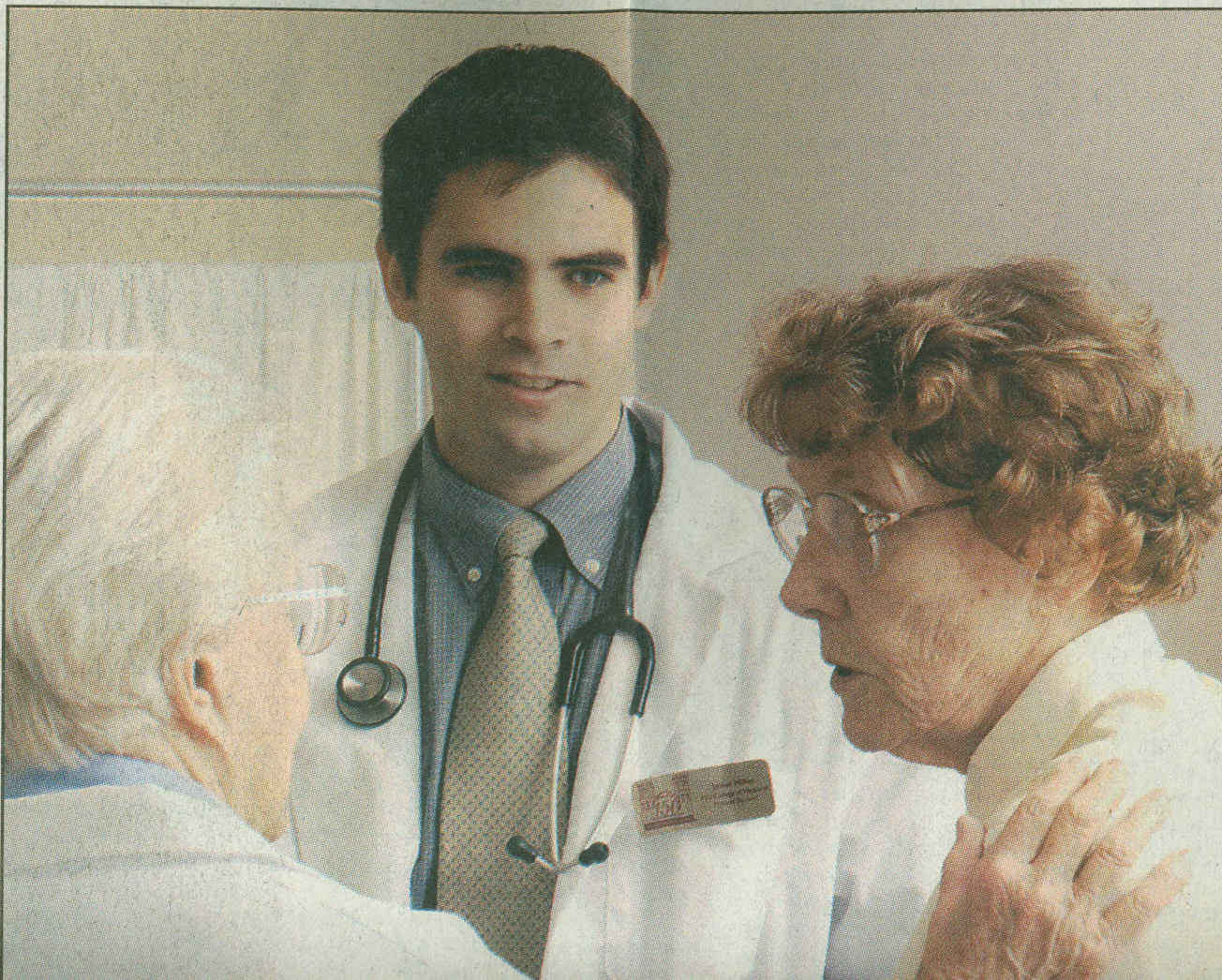
MARY ANN LINDLEY

EDITORIAL PAGE EDITOR

Important players such as then-House Speaker John Thrasher and the university's own high-profile president, Sandy D'Alemberte, dominated debate over the \$60 million project in the spring of 2000.

FSU was brashly contemplating an unconventional program, one training only primary care doctors for underserved communities. This in an era of specialists, and at a time when some leaders in the medical profession were telling Congress that no more doctors or medical schools were needed in this country.

The debate hasn't died down, either, with FSU now wrestling to win accreditation of the program that enrolled its first 30



Miller are proud that they and their classmates have this extraordinary chance to reinvigorate a kind of intimate medicine that largely disappeared in the 1960s as specialists not only ruled the day but began making so much money that they became royalty in their communities.



Julie Gladden

But as managed health care and insurance shortages have changed the dynamics, there is a distinct place for the differently focused kind of doctors FSU is determined to turn out.

While it doesn't take a brain surgeon to know that much is amiss in America today regarding delivery of health care, it does take laser-like persistence to help shift the established order.

"It's a disconnect," says D'Alemberte. "The critics think it's arrogant that we've designed a program that addresses the weaknesses of medical education. But we're going to be turning out physicians we know are badly needed. Our applicants are much

gram that emphasizes the needs of med students last fall.

Nearing the end of their first year, those students are now a visible force when the critics set to work.

They exude vitality and idealism and are true believers in FSU's mission: primary care transported to where it's needed most — among the elderly and to rural and worn-out parts of America's cities. These are places where the kind of suburban medicine many Americans take for granted is extinct, and the old-fashioned country doctors who once served them long gone.

First-year med student Julie Gladden, a Tallahassee native, says she and her classmates consider themselves "pathfinders." They see themselves as the generation that is reinventing medicine, making it at once more accessible and technologically up to the nanosecond.

The Class of 2005, housed in remodeled facilities of the old Florida High, studies in one of the most progressive medical libraries extant. It is 100-percent out-of-the-box new, containing the sum of 21st-century medical knowledge and everything being contemplated. They have access to all this intellectual capital on hand-held computers, too. They take them from patient to patient, holding their medical histories quite literally in the palm of their hand.

Gladden is a somewhat



FSU medical student Javier Miller visits with Westminster Oaks residents Ruth Childs, right, and Dr. Charlotte Maguire, left.

RAY STANYARD /Courtesy of FSU College of Medicine

unconventional student, having shifted from her career as a physical therapist, which taught her how much she loved hands-on care. She wanted to know more and expand her healing skills. She wanted to become a doctor.

Javier Miller, whose parents are both physicians in Orlando, must dazzle the critics, too. He finished undergraduate school at the University of Florida with a 4-point grade average and a burning desire to be on the

ground floor of a new way of practicing medicine.

Miller is a centrifugal force at the med school, elected president of its brand-new student council and exuding the sense of unity this founding class feels to its solar plexus.

Miller and Sachin Parikh and eight other FSU med students raised the money to spend their spring break this year in two small, isolated Panamanian villages. They saw dozens of patients and worked in a make-

shift clinics alongside Tallahassee physician Eric Handler in one village. They encountered primitive public health issues under the instructive eye of two faculty members, physician Richard Usatine and R.N. Sarah Sherraden, and of retired Tallahassee physician Edwin Crane.

"Just like they teach us here at FSU, we saw that it's all about treating the patient and not just the disease," Miller said.

Students like Gladden and

more mission driven than most, and carefully screened to be that way."

Controversial, too, is that instead of building a traditional teaching hospital, the med school is affiliating with major medical centers in Orlando and Pensacola, Tallahassee Community Hospital and several neighborhood and veterans clinics.

FSU is eager to work out a partnership with Tallahassee Memorial as well, but TMH has thus far rejected the opportunity, citing financial concerns.

"We'll keep trying," says Mollie Hill, director of community clinical relations. "TMH has a great network of clinics and I really want our students to be exposed to those doctors."

Meanwhile, FSU is at work resolving the remaining six of 182 accreditation standards that concern the accreditation team — but which D'Alemberte terms "patently absurd" and easily disproven concerns.

Every indication is that he is fundamentally right in his premise that the accreditation team simply hasn't caught up with FSU's back-to-the-future approach to 21st-century medicine. Such reluctance to accept new ways is a commonplace symptom of our skeptical times, of course. But I'd put my money on the persuasive powers of this can-do Class of 2005 to help turn things around.