

Med School Taps Dean

By Melanie Yeager

DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

Florida State University's new medical school dean envisions a future where patients correspond with their doctors by e-mail - even in rural Florida.

And those same doctors, says Dr. Joseph Scherger, will be able to tap into the most up-to-date research to treat their patients, thanks to information provided by FSU's medical school via video feed or the Internet.

"Patients deserve the best care no matter who they go to, even in the small towns in the Panhandle," said Scherger, who was chosen to lead the school Tuesday.

Scherger's appointment by Provost Larry Abele is the result of a national search that took several months. He begins work July 1.

"His enthusiasm for improving medical services is infectious," Abele said.

Scherger, 50, is associate dean for primary care at the University of California at Irvine. He received his medical degree from the University of California at Los Angeles School of Medicine in 1975. After completing his family practice residency at the University of Washington, he served two years in the National Health Service Corps as a migrant health physician before starting a private practice in the small community of Dixon, Calif.

His online faculty profile at UC-Irvine cites his interests as preventive medicine through a healthy lifestyle and treating overweight patients.

Scherger spoke on ABC's "World News Tonight with Peter Jennings" on Tuesday about a recent American Medical Association study that shows medication errors occur three times more often among hospitalized children than adults.

"I have always been an active family doctor and will, in some capacity, continue," Scherger said.

"I think he will just be an exceptional role model for students," said Myra Hurt, acting dean of the FSU medical school and head of the search committee.

The first class at FSU's new medical college, which was created to produce primary-care doctors, begins May 7. Students spend their first two years in Tallahassee; then they will be dispatched to clinical training sites in other cities, instead of being taught in a hospital operated by the medical school. Some students' training will include time in rural North Florida towns.

Thirty students have been admitted to FSU's first class, which will graduate in 2005. FSU plans to eventually graduate 120 students a year.

Serving the underserved

Scherger's appointment was praised Tuesday by several national medical leaders.

"He is somewhat unique in medicine in his experience in both practice and academic camps," said Dr. Norman Kahn, vice president of science and education for the American Academy of Family Physicians.

Dr. Robert Graham, former CEO of the academy, called Scherger a person of "great vision and considerable organizational skills."

"Hurrah," said Dr. Daniel Tosteson, dean emeritus of the Harvard Medical School. "I think he's extremely well-qualified to serve as the founding dean . . . He is, I think, a superb physician, long interested in the care of the underserved, particularly Mexican immigrants."

Tosteson served on the FSU committee that screened candidates and forwarded three unranked names to Abele. The short list included Scherger; Dr. James Gavin III, a senior scientific officer with Howard Hughes Medical Institute in Maryland; and Dr. Tom M. Johnson, the consultant for FSU's new medical school and professor emeritus of internal medicine at Michigan State University's medical college.

"I really wish we could have everyone come. We had such a good group," Abele said. He said he hopes to persuade Johnson to assist with the college's accreditation efforts.

Scherger will make \$275,000 a year. By comparison, the deans at the University of Florida and the University of South Florida make \$338,000 and \$350,000, respectively. In addition to dean duties, UF and USF leaders also serve as vice presidents of other colleges, such as nursing and pharmacy.

At FSU, Scherger said, his first order of business will be accreditation.

"We have a very good start for the first year of a medical school, which Florida State has been doing for a long time," Scherger said, referring to FSU's former Program In Medical Sciences, which fed into UF's medical school. "Being a nontraditional school, I think, makes the challenge greater."

JOSEPH SCHERGER

Age: 50

Background: A native of Delphos, Ohio.

Education: Medical degree, University of California at Los Angeles School of Medicine; family practice residency, University of Washington in Seattle, where he also received a master's degree in public health.

Professional: Faculty member at University of California at Irvine, 1996-present. Editor-in-chief of Hippocrates , published by the Massachusetts Medical Society; board of directors for the American Academy of Family Physicians, 1995-98; private practice,

Dixon, Calif., 1980-92; medical school instructor, University of California at Davis, 1978-92; and National Health Service Corps migrant health physician, 1978-80.

Honors: American Academy of Family Physicians' 1989 Family Physician of the Year; elected to National Academy of Science's Institute of Medicine, 1992.

Personal: Wife, Carol Wintermute; two sons, Adrian, 23, and Gabriel, 21.