

New residency program to begin in 2014 at Lee Memorial

*Written by Gary A. Goforth, M.D.
Feb. 04*

news-press.com

Starting in July 2014, resident physicians will be a new addition to the list of people who call Southwest Florida home as Lee Memorial Health System — in partnership with the Florida State University College of Medicine — initiates its new residency program.

This new training program will provide long-lasting health benefits to the community.

Florida faces the threat of a primary care physician shortage with a reform bill that provides 38 million more Americans access to health care. Increasing the number of primary care physicians and establishing patient-centered medical homes, which emphasize preventive care, are vital to improving quality in our overwhelmed health care system.

Keep in mind it takes roughly seven to 10 years to fully educate a medical student for independent practice. The time to act is now. We simply cannot sit by and let the expected shortage take hold. In 2011, LMHS leadership saw this challenge as an opportunity to invest in the future and increase the number of well-trained physicians dedicated to primary care in Southwest Florida by developing a family medicine residency program.

The Accreditation Council of Graduate Medical Education completed its initial review of the program in October and found it met all standards related to faculty, curriculum design, institutional support, and clinical research.

A Family Medicine Center has been operational at Lee Memorial Hospital since July, but the ACGME recently indicated an FMC large enough for 18 residents be constructed before hiring. Funding has been approved and construction is expected to be complete by April 2014. In the meantime, faculty will continue to build the practice to support the program and have already enrolled more than 4,300 patients.

With such strides, LMHS is confident the ACGME will accredit the program in May, and residents will begin training July 1, 2014.

The program, the first of its kind between Tampa and Miami, will provide countless benefits. The FMC will accept nearly every type of health insurance, including Medicaid, providing more access to care. The new doctors in training will challenge faculty to remain current on the latest medical research.

The goal of the program is to increase the number of family physicians in Southwest Florida. Residents will be recruited throughout the country, but preference will be given to those who plan to practice here after graduation. Historically, more than 50 percent of graduates practice in the same area as their training program. It is anticipated the first graduates will open practices in 2017, stimulating the economy and create new jobs.

This program was created in response to the many challenges that lie ahead. It aspires to develop tomorrow's health care leaders through educational efforts, improved methods of health care delivery, and by implementing innovative programs into practice. Just as health reform is changing focus to preventive measures, we too must invest in the future to ensure the health and well-being of our community.

— Gary A. Goforth, M.D., is founding program director of the Florida State University College of Medicine Family Medicine Residency Program at Lee Memorial Health System (Fort Myers). He can be reached at 343-2371.