

PRESS RELEASE

FSU Medical School Issues Call for "Patients"

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By Nancy Kinnally

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. -- Florida State University is putting out an unusual casting call, and it's not coming from the schools of film or theater.

The FSU College of Medicine is looking for people of all ages who can be trained to feign a variety of medical conditions -- from Alzheimer's disease to tennis elbow to a stroke -- for the sake of education.

The stage for these medical mimics will be one of seven examination rooms in the college's state-of-the-art Clinical Learning Center, a simulated doctor's office in which medical students will practice their clinical and patient communication skills. Key to the center's operation will be the recruitment and training of a group of up to 200 standardized patients to serve as the medical school's "central casting."

"Being a standardized patient requires good short-term memory and the ability to stay in character," said Sarah Sherraden, director of the Clinical Learning Center. "You have to be able to consistently portray a patient with a given history and physical findings."

FSU's Clinical Learning Center is set to open this August in the medical school's newly renovated quarters at the former FSU Developmental Research School at Stadium Drive and Call Street.

About 80 percent of U.S. medical schools operate similar programs, which are expected to become standard now that the National Board of Medical Examiners has mandated that by the middle of this decade the medical licensing exam will include observed patient encounters, known formally in academic medicine as Observed Structured Clinical Examinations, or OSCEs.

The "actors" selected for the standardized patient program will be paid \$15 an hour and will be required to go through one to three one-hour coaching sessions prior to each set of student encounters.

The standardized patient program also will use patients with actual medical conditions or with a history of certain conditions. These patients will be recruited directly through physicians' offices.

Medical school faculty will observe students interacting with standardized patients on a closed circuit camera and in small groups and will assess the students' clinical and patient communication skills. These sessions can last anywhere from two hours to a full day.

"It's a fun job that offers a lot of flexibility, in that people can do it as often as weekly or as seldom as every three months or so," Sherraden said.

Anyone wishing to audition for a part in the ongoing medical drama at FSU's Clinical Learning Center can contact Sherraden at (850) 644-9800.