

PRESS RELEASE

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Grant Benefits Geriatric Education at the FSU College of Medicine

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By Doug Carlson

TALLAHASSEE, FL -- Elderly people consume almost 40 percent of all health care services in this country, but in most cases, the elderly do not see a geriatrician when they visit the doctor. That's one reason the Florida State University College of Medicine strives to instill the principles of geriatric medicine in all of its students, regardless of their likelihood of specializing in geriatric health care. Now, with a \$2 million grant from the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation, the College of Medicine plans to expand its curriculum to teach principles of geriatrics care that can be applied across the lifespan. The college is one of 10 medical schools nationwide to win a Reynolds Foundation grant this year. The Donald W. Reynolds Foundation is a national philanthropic organization founded in 1954 by the late media entrepreneur for whom it is named. Headquartered in Las Vegas, it is one of the largest private foundations in the United States. The foundation launched its Aging and Quality of Life Program in 1996 with the goal of improving the quality of life for America's elderly by preparing physicians to provide better care for them. "What most of us in geriatrics have understood for a long time is that the principles of care that we believe in are not unique or only supposed to be applied in older populations," said Dr. Lisa Granville, associate chair and professor in the college's department of geriatrics, and principal investigator for the Reynolds Foundation grant. In order to help patients of all ages, the FSU medical school plans a curriculum that doesn't label the principles being taught as geriatric. This curriculum will start the moment medical students set foot on campus, allowing broad acceptance and application of geriatric concepts in all disciplines of medical education, Granville said. For example, a common tool in geriatrics is functional assessment, focusing on a patient's ability to perform tasks such as walking unaided or driving. While geriatricians routinely employ functional assessment, the concept applies to patients of all ages. Establishing quality communication between a doctor and patient is another practice emphasized in geriatrics that all physicians should regard as essential, she said. In part, the goal will be accomplished by working with clinical faculty for third- and fourth-year students, extending the training to the more than 800 physicians throughout Florida who work with FSU medical students. Teaching the concepts across a four-year curriculum will result in doctors better trained in geriatric care as they enter practice in a variety of fields and encounter patients who would benefit from such care regardless of age, Granville said. She noted that this is especially important in Florida, a state in which 18 percent of the residents are elderly - the nation's largest population of elderly residents - and at a time when life expectancy for Americans is at an all-time high of 77.6 years.