

Medical school turns out first regional FSU grads

Area hospitals provided on-the-job training

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When a group of wanna-be doctors landed in Pensacola two years ago, they knew they would be taught personally by practicing physicians, that they would receive hands-on training and access to patients.

And they knew they would be challenged like never before. They probably didn't know how good it would feel when it was all over.

Faculty of the Florida State University College of Medicine's Pensacola regional campus joined members of the medical community Monday evening to celebrate the achievements of nine new doctors. The graduates are members of the inaugural class of Florida State's medical program,

which has third- and fourth-year students studying at three regional campuses in Florida.

It's not the average medical program. It's a new model that partners with Florida communities and aims to produce patient-centered physicians capable of keeping up with a changing health-care environment.

Paul McLeod, dean of the Pensacola campus, said he knows the students of the inaugural class took a risk in choosing FSU over a more traditional medical school.

"Our students could have gone to Johns Hopkins. They could have gone to Harvard," McLeod said. "They could have gone to any premier medical school they wanted."

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Paul McLeod, dean of the Pensacola Campus for Florida State University College of Medicine, congratulates Julie Gladden on Monday during a graduation celebration.

First Pensacola regional campus class of FSU medical program



Natosha
Canty



Amanda
Sumner



Kimberly
Ruscher-
Rogers



Ajay
Mhatre



Karen
Miles



Julie
Gladden



Fawn
Grisby



Joda
Lynn



Laura
Dacks

Pensacola served as regional campus

FROM 1A

But, he explained, what they got may have actually been better. They were taught by practicing physicians and judged by those who they aspire to be like.

Pensacola's nine graduates will join graduates from regional campuses in Orlando and Tallahassee for an official graduation ceremony Saturday morning in Tallahassee.

Then, the nine new doctors will leave Pensacola this summer to begin residency programs in states from Connecticut to Texas. Excitement was evident in their faces Monday evening at the National Museum of Naval Aviation, but there was some sadness in the air.

These students had made Pensacola their home and were here during a tragic time during the city's history — Hurricane Ivan. They lived here during some of their greatest accomplishments and milestones. One of them asked his sweetheart to be his bride on Pensacola Beach.

Joda Lynn, 26, was one of two males in the female-dominated Pensacola class. He and his new wife, Rachel Lynn, 24, squeezed the wedding in during a break between his third and fourth years of

study. Rachel Lynn spent the first year of her marriage supporting her highly motivated husband and helping him get through his last year of medical school.

"Someone's got to work," she said, laughing. Rachel Lynn taught fourth grade at Holm Elementary School while in Pensacola.

Joda Lynn, who has wanted to be a doctor "for as long as I can remember," said the most challenging part was finding a balance between family and the rigors of medical school. He will complete his residency at Morton Plant Mease Health Care in Clearwater, then hopes to return to Perry, his hometown.

Lynn said Pensacola's size was one of the deciding factors when he had to choose whether to study in Tallahassee, Orlando or Pensacola. The program, although new, proved



R. Lynn



Miller



McLeod

worth the risk, he said.

"I think it's awesome that we got to work one-on-one with practicing physicians," he said. "We got a lot of access to patients that a lot of medical students don't get."

Natosha Canty was presented with the only award of the evening, the campus dean's award.

"I've wanted to be a doctor since I was in the sixth or seventh grade," she said. "I do feel like I've gotten a whole lot more hands-on experience with this program."

Canty will complete her residency at Tallahassee Memorial Hospital, near her hometown of Havana.

During the ceremony, McLeod called each graduate to the stage while reading comments about their performance from the physicians who watched over them.

Words such as "eager to learn," "hard-working," "a great future doctor" "wonderful with patients" were used to describe the nine graduates. Representatives from Baptist Health Care, Sacred Heart Hospital, Santa Rosa Medical Center and West Florida Hospital each spoke words of congratulations to the students, thanking them for the opportunity to help foster the education

of new doctors.

McLeod described the students as risk-takers who were flexible and not easily discouraged. Impressive, considering that the new program did have "a few bumps in the road," he said.

Dr. Craig Miller, senior vice president and chief medical officer for Baptist Health Care, was among the group that first secured Pensacola as one of three regional campuses for the new College of Medicine. He was there to celebrate the inaugural class of an already-expanding program.

"The medical community recognized the need to have medical education here," Miller said. "We have a tremendous need in this community for new medical professionals."

Because of limited residency programs in Pensacola, all nine students will complete their residencies in other cities. Miller said the next step for health-care education in Pensacola is to explore an expansion in post-medical school education in an effort to keep graduates in the area.

"But, we have to start with baby steps," he said. "This is a very important evening."