

## Program aims to attract more family doctors to SWFL

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By Joelle Parks, NBC2 Reporter

The number of family doctors is dwindling in southwest Florida, but one organization is taking steps to fix that.

Norman Llug has a cold. He couldn't find a doctor, so instead he's at Lee Convenient Care.

"I thought maybe they help me get over this," says Klug.

General practitioners to care for Norman and other Lee County patients are dwindling.

"It's not going to be just here, it's going to be nationwide," says Dr. Barry Butler from Primary Care Associates

Dr. Butler says it's because family practice is not a profitable specialty, making it unappealing for residents graduating medical school hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt.

"At the end of the day you still have to pay your bills, you still have to eat, you still have to live and that- going forward- is an issue," says Butler.

Lee Memorial Hospital estimates a shortfall of 162 general practitioners in their system over the next three years.

To fix that, they're waiting for their accreditation to start the hospital's first residency program.

"We take them from head knowledge to practical knowledge and make them full functioning physicians," says Lee Memorial's Residency Director Dr. Gary Goforth.

The program is set to start this summer with six Florida State University Medical School graduates. It will provide more medical care to the community in the short term, but has long term goals.

"We hope many of the graduates will stay in the area, set up practice here and be able to take care of all the people in southwest Florida," says Goforth.

The program is designed to grow each year but will face rising costs.

"Between the electronic medical records, malpractice insurance, the personnel for billing and other things that are required it's almost impossible for a private practitioner these days," says Butler.