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EDUCATION

TMH, FSU College of Medicine in discussions to establish 'academic medical center'

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Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare and Florida State University's College of Medicine, which have worked closely since the college opened 20 years ago, are working on plans to expand that relationship.

The goal, which TMH has identified for several years in its strategic plan, is to partner with the FSU College of Medicine to become an academic medical center.

An academic medical center is a hospital that partners with teaching institutions to offer a combination of clinical care, research and education. Such partnerships are desired because they can lead to new technologies, therapies, and clinical trials not always available at other hospitals.

In November, a leading global consultant firm, Guidehouse, was hired by TMH to develop a blueprint on what would be involved in creating an academic medical center at TMH as well as defining the relationship between the hospital and the university and expanding that relationship beyond physician training.

The Guidehouse study also will address a governance structure, profile the graduate medical education programs and examine the clinical and research portfolios of each institution.

Mark O'Bryant, president and CEO of Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare, said both sides will determine the best approach to fund the initiative "as we move forward."

He explained TMH and the FSU College of Medicine already have some shared cost relationships related to research, as well as partnerships in the training of medical students and several residency programs. He declined to say how much TMH is paying for the consultant's study.

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"We've been working diligently on this for the past several months," O'Bryant told the Democrat. "We've made significant progress and we'll soon be able to advance that to our TMH board."

O'Bryant said he plans to share details of the Guidehouse study to the TMH board on April 28, where he is seeking its approval to move forward in planning.

"Even though we have been working together the last 15 to 20 years, this will give us a formal plan that will drive how we advance," O'Bryant said of TMH and the FSU College of Medicine.

John Thrasher: 'A great opportunity'

FSU President John Thrasher briefed the university's Board of Trustees earlier this month on the concept. Until now, he said, most of the discussions have focused on the integration of clinical, research, education and community initiatives across both institutions.

"I think it's one of those things we envisioned many years ago when we talked about our College of Medicine and how we could expand it potentially with a clinical partner," Thrasher told trustees. "This is a great opportunity."

Thrasher, who is retiring once his successor is on board, was Speaker of the House in 2000 when the legislation creating the medical school became law. He is credited with being instrumental in helping navigate the political process in getting legislative approval for the first new medical school to be created in the U.S. in 20 years.

The administrative building at the main campus was named in Thrasher's honor when the building opened in 2004.

Thrasher told the Tallahassee Democrat that if approved, the development of the academic medical center would evolve over the next five to 10 years.

A key component would be an expansion of research collaborations between the FSU campus and TMH that would be of benefit to both entities as well as the community, he said.

“The driver is to give us a broader experience for research, for our students to have more residencies, to impact the entire university in terms of research development on the medical side, but have other things, too, engineering, social issues, things like that we can work with TMH on, that would be of benefit to both of us, particularly in the terms of research and our students’ ability to have a broader opportunity at a teaching hospital,” Thrasher said.

While specific details are still being worked out, Thrasher said, “the point is, we’re having really constructive conversations and moving ahead that idea and concept.”

College of Medicine has many affiliations

The FSU College of Medicine affiliates with more than 180 health-care organizations across Florida, including dozens of hospitals.

TMH has been one of the College of Medicine’s educational affiliate hospitals since the college opened.

Third- and fourth-year medical students and Physician Assistant students from the college’s Tallahassee regional campus do required and elective rotations with the physicians on the medical staff and the College of Medicine sponsors two residency programs at TMH – internal medicine and general surgery.

Capital Regional Medical Center is also an affiliate hospital for the regional campus, as is Archbold Medical Center in Thomasville.

“This plan will increase the present partnership with TMH to develop additional needed residency programs in Tallahassee, and will create opportunities to develop a strong clinical research partnership to advance clinical and translational projects for the clinical investigators at TMH and the basic and clinical science researchers at the university,” FSU College of Medicine Dean Dr. John P. Fogarty said in an email.

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