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Our Opinion: TMH program helps Residency shortage remains critical

A united front has been at work in recent months, aiming at interrupting Tallahassee's famous import-export business.

That is, we import thousands of bright, ambitious goal-oriented young people year after year. They stay here a few years for college and then they graduate — becoming the capital city's greatest export.

The Knight Creative Communities Initiative, for example, is concentrating on finding ways to keep graduates and young professionals invested in living and working in Tallahassee.

This week, the Tallahassee Memorial Family Medicine Residency Program graduated 11 young doctors and of these, five will stay in Tallahassee, with two others staying in the state of Florida.

"Tallahassee benefits greatly when this many graduates choose to stay here to practice," said Dr. Donald A. Zorn, who directs the Family Medicine Residency Program at TMH.

The family medicine program has now had 301 graduates since its implementation in 1973, and of those 97 have stayed in Tallahassee; 180 in Florida.

This residency program at TMH is important because a majority of physicians will start their practice in the same state where they did their residency. At Florida State University's College of Medicine, 40 percent of students in its fourth-year class were matched with residency programs in Florida, up from 30 percent in 2009. "We're continuing to meet this mission," Dean John Fogarty told the *Democrat* in March, describing its goal of training primary care doctors, especially for medically underserved areas. One of Mr. Fogarty's larger goals is to increase the number of residency programs in Tallahassee — and across the state.

In-state residencies are coveted but too limited given the increasing number of students graduating from Florida's medical schools. We now have nine medical schools, but fewer than 40 percent of medical students are placed in Florida residencies. This causes a decrease in the number of doctors

in our state — the fourth most populated in the country. Florida currently has almost twice the number of patients per physician as the national average.

For the state to be educating medical students, but then exporting them to other states, is not a good situation and one on which state and federal lawmakers need to keep their focus.

Medicare helps fund many residencies and U.S. Senator Bill Nelson has introduced a Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act, which could help — if only it were funded. Certainly Florida cannot continue to pay for the medical education of doctors that are likely to practice in other states.

So while the news is very encouraging from TMH, wonderful for this community, the situation remains dire statewide. There is no quick cure.
