

## Who will YOUR physician be in 20 years?

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As many are aware, there is a physician shortage in the U.S., a shortage some predict could exceed 100,000 physicians in 10 years. This is due to our increasing life expectancy and the growing number of people gaining access to health insurance. Graduate medical education (GME) refers to the residency training all medical students must complete after their four years of medical school in order to practice medicine. A majority of its funding comes from medicare. The federal government currently pays about 9.5 billion dollars towards GME funding. The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 placed a cap on the number of medicare-funded residency slots in this country. This cap was based on the reported number of residents at hospitals in 1996 and this cap remains today. It is projected that by the year 2015, the number of residency slots available will be less than the number of graduating U.S. medical students. Currently, about 72% of our residents graduated from U.S. medical schools while the rest are international graduates. We need more residency slots in order to train the number of doctors required to take care of our growing population.

The state of Florida alone has created three new medical schools in the past four years: UCF, FIU and FAU. The charter class at UCF graduated this past May. Currently in Florida, there are not enough residency slots for the graduating Florida medical students. This means that many of our Florida graduates are leaving Florida to complete their residency. Studies show that the majority of physicians stay and practice in the area where they finish their residency. This is especially an issue with Florida's growing elderly population. This issue affects everyone from all socioeconomic statuses, races and ages. There simply will not be enough supply for the growing demand.

Medicare funding has been on the chopping block recently and with the current recession more cuts may be made. This will greatly affect the well-being of our country and our state. GME funding is an important investment into the future health of our nation. Individuals and families who have recently moved to a new area, even to Tallahassee, have had difficulty finding a primary care physician to care for them. Many aren't accepting new patients including those

with medicare. Physicians, especially in primary care, are already saturated and even if they want to take new patients they physically can't. We need to continue to provide residency slots to the growing number of eager, passionate medical students so that they can take care of you, your mother, your father and your children in the future.

As a current third year medical student at the Florida State University College of Medicine, I am very excited about my future career as a physician. I can speak for my class and say that we are all passionate about medicine and improving the well-being of others. We are currently working hard in medical school to become the best patient-focused physicians we can be. In order for us to provide health care to the general population we need the opportunity to go to residency and continue our training. The majority of us are from Florida and many would like to stay here to complete residency. Our own Florida Senator, Bill Nelson, has proposed a bill called the Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act of 2011 that seeks to increase the number of medicare-funded residency slots by 15%. For more information on this issue please visit this website: [http://www.healthaffairs.org/healthpolicybriefs/brief.php?brief\\_id=73](http://www.healthaffairs.org/healthpolicybriefs/brief.php?brief_id=73)