



## Work begins on Newtown medical practice

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Sarasota Memorial Hospital project will deliver access to doctors

By **Barbara Peters Smith**

Staff Writer



SARASOTA — Sarasota Memorial Hospital leaders broke ground Wednesday for a medical office in Newtown that will provide ongoing care for adults in the community — and also serve as a magnet for the city’s next generation of primary care physicians.

Developed with the Florida State University College of Medicine, which has a satellite campus in Sarasota, this area’s first accredited residency program will train young doctors to treat people over 18 with chronic health needs. These newly graduated medical school doctors will have ongoing relationships with their patients, both at the Newtown practice and the hospital, explained program director Wilhelmine Weise-Rometsch.

Beginning in July, the first 13 doctors being recruited now will start caring for Newtown patients under supervision by a faculty of internal medicine specialists, with another 13 added each year for an eventual total of 39.

“That’s a wealth of health for all of us,” Sarasota Mayor Willie Shaw told the gathering of community residents and leaders from the hospital, university and city.

Shaw said that in 2014 he pressed incoming hospital CEO David Verinder and board chair Marguerite Malone for an urgent care center to serve the historically black neighborhood.

“It was politely explained to me that that’s not going to work,” he recalled. “They said, ‘What you need is access to health care.’”

The kind of ongoing preventive care that can keep patients with health issues out of emergency rooms and hospitals is also the kind of “long-term therapeutic relationship” essential to training medical residents, Weise-Rometsch said.

And Verinder predicted that the Newtown program will be the first of several designed to attract doctors to the area, as Sarasota Memorial “evolves into the teaching hospital that the community deserves.”

The internal medicine residency offers “an opportunity to bring new physicians into this growing community, and train them here, and most importantly, keep them here,” Verinder said. “And we wanted to bring health care to where we thought there was a greater need.”

Verinder thanked community partners involved in the new doctor’s office, including donors Jean and Al Goldstein, Renee Hamad, and Robert P. Martin of Boar’s Head Brand.

“As soon as they heard about this program,” he said of the donors, “each of them came to us individually and said, ‘How can I help?’”

Joan Meek, the associate dean for graduate medical education at FSU, said that residencies in community-based health care are an outgrowth of the school’s commitment to keep medical expertise in Florida. The state ranks third in the nation in population, but 23rd in the number of practicing doctors, she said, mentioning a projected shortage of some 7,000 physicians over the next decade.

“If they don’t have a place to complete their residencies,” she said of Florida medical graduates, “there’s a likelihood they will leave the state. And the citizens of Newtown will help to educate our doctors as well.”