FSU College of Medicine moves with plans for southwest medical center

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Florida State University’s College of Medicine is moving ahead with plans to open a primary health center in southwest Tallahassee.

Dr. Daniel Van Durme, senior associate dean for clinical and community affairs, said a meeting will be held this week with architects to discuss designs for FSU PrimaryHealth, a comprehensive care center at Roberts Avenue and Eisenhower Street.

The next step is to seek bids from contractors, firm up building costs and getting final approval from FSU President John Thrasher. A groundbreaking is scheduled for May 17.

“We have a strong commitment from FSU’s leadership to proceed,” Van Durme, adding the university decided on building a standalone facility rather than using a modular building.

If things go as planned, the 10,000-square-foot complex could be completed by March.

“We will be providing services for children and adults and we will be integrating mental health services as needed, rather than referring you elsewhere,” he said.

Van Durme said the initial plan is to have the center open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. with the possibility of extended hours once demand has been evaluated.

It will be staffed by pediatricians and family physicians currently on faculty at the College of Medicine, in addition to others who will be hired in the next several months.

In addition, medical students and students from the college’s Physician Assistant program will work there, along with nurses, office staff and medical assistants.

While the center will be available to anyone in Leon and surrounding counties, one reason for the location is to serve the moderate to lower income residents in nearby Providence, Mabry Manor, The Meadows and Seminole Manor communities near Sabal Palm Elementary School. Residents from the neighborhoods will be selected to...
We are actually the only medical school that does not yet have some sort of facility like this, where the faculty is seeing patients and teaching at the same time,” Van Durme said.

He said the plan is not to grow into a medical school “that employs hundreds of doctors in dozens of locations, generating millions of dollars of revenue.”

Patients on Medicare, Medicaid, private insurance and those non-insured all will be served, he said. What percentages of patients accepted in those categories will later be determined, he said, adding, “we have to maintain some minimal profit margin.”

Last March, FSU College of Medicine Dean John P. Fogarty informed community leaders of the plan to build in the southwest. That came eight months after the college abandoned plans to build across from the Renaissance Center in Frenchtown, following opposition that it would compete with the nearby Neighborhood Medical Center.

The new location will be built in a community where there are no nearby medical facilities or grocery outlets.

FSU owned 3 acres at the site and recently purchased an additional acre from the city. An abandoned Florida Highway Patrol building also sits on 2 acres, but it will eventually be knocked down.

Partner in "community school" plan for Sabal Palm Elementary

And, while the FSU PrimaryHealth is a university initiative, Van Durme also is representing the College of Medicine in a partnership working to introduce a "community school" concept at nearby Sabal Palm Elementary.

The four core partners are Children’s Home Society of Florida; Leon County Schools; Florida A&M University's College of Education and FSU PrimaryHealth. The group has held planning meetings for several months. Community school projects are underway in several Florida communities. The goal is to provide wraparound services beneficial to students and parents in a school setting.

On Monday, representatives said they were closing in on getting a memorandum of understanding reviewed by attorneys from the four entities. The next step would be hiring a director for the program.

Full details have yet to be worked out, including funding. The memorandum of understanding would focus on a 25-year-agreement, said Charles McDonald, executive director of Children’s Home Society of Florida.

“Our first major hurdle is the MOU,” McDonald said. “We need to get that done.”

The “community” portion would focus on addressing issues that go beyond classrooms: poverty, health care and access, hunger and extended counseling.

“We’ve had lots of conversations and I think we see the train slowly moving,” Superintendent Rocky Hanna said.
He said the school district would be looking to CHS to take the lead, adding, “We don’t have the capital assets to do this on our own.”

Van Durme said the medical center would remain an independent operation on its own. As a partner, it could provide services such as back-to-school shots, physicals and address any minor medical incidents at the school.

Sabal Palm Principal Anicia Robinson said the medical center will be a welcomed benefit to parents and the community.

“This will be a great place for them to go right in their community to get those things done,” she said.

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