



## **FSU makes residency partnership with Winter Haven Hospital official**

**By Mike Ferguson**

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WINTER HAVEN – Winter Haven Hospital and one of the state’s most prestigious universities are working together to alleviate the shortage of physicians.

Administrative staff from the hospital and BayCare, the parent not-for-profit health care system with which the hospital is affiliated, and Florida State University made the partnership official Friday afternoon at the Winter Haven Hospital auditorium. The two entities will collaborate to form a residency program.

“Bringing residents here, I think, significantly helps Winter Haven Hospital in the future to recruit more physicians,” FSU President John Thrasher said. “Florida State has always had great friends in Polk County. It took a lot of effort from our staff and Winter Haven Hospital and BayCare.”

According to Steve Nierman, president of Winter Haven Hospital, Florida is below the national average when it comes to physicians per 100,000 in population. When it comes to Florida, there are about 85 primary care doctors per 100,000 in population. In Polk County, that number is 62.5.

“As a nonprofit health community and a nonprofit health system, we try to focus on the needs,” Nierman said. “If you train doctors in your community, there is a better chance they’ll stay. We’re so happy to have FSU here.”

John P. Fogarty, dean of Florida State’s College of Medicine, said about two-thirds of FSU graduates do their residencies outside of the state, but about 60 percent come back to practice in Florida. Once completing their residency, Fogarty said, most work within 100 miles of that location.

“It might take a while to get this done,” Fogarty said. “Hang in there and we’ll get this done together.”

Fogarty noted that FSU also has residency programs with hospitals in Tallahassee, Sarasota and Fort Myers and that they have been successful when it comes to physician recruiting. The residency in Winter Haven will make four active residency partnerships for the Tallahassee-based university.

“When a medical student graduates from medical school, they get a shiny new degree and what can they do with that? Nothing,” said Joan Meek, FSU’s associate dean for graduate medical education. “That residency is the vital phase where they really learn how to be a family physician. There’s really such a strong and continuous need for outpatient care.”

Family medicine is one area where FSU tries to focus, which covers everything from the “womb to the tomb.” That falls under the purview of primary care.

“Our medical school has a mission that’s consistent with Winter Haven Hospital’s,” said Doug Carlson, director of public affairs and communications for the FSU College of Medicine. “We’re projected to have a shortage when it comes to family medicine. That’s an area where our school probably has more than most.”

Nierman said the effort to find a partner for a residency program has been going on for about a year. The notion to start one came after conducting a formal study on physician retention.

“It’s difficult to recruit to a rural area,” Nierman said. “There is a specific strategy to get them to stay.”

Moving forward, a director will be hired for the residency program. He or she will start the accreditation process, which includes a site visit from the accrediting agency.

Applicants will be matched to the first three-year program in Winter Haven in March 2020. Six residents will be taken annually, beginning July 1, 2020. The Outpatient Behavioral Health building, 1201 First St. S., will be shared by residents and hospital staff.

The Board of County Commissioners agreed to put \$3.7 million from the indigent health care fund toward the program Tuesday.

“We hope that 50 percent of these residents stay here in Polk County; that’s our goal,” Nierman said. “We look forward to the future of medicine here in Winter Haven and in Polk County.”

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