School of Medicine observes 40 years of educating and training health care professionals

This year marks the University of Nevada School of Medicine’s 40th year of providing health care professionals to this state and beyond. Here we a look back at our history through this timeline compiled from Dr. Anton’s Sohn’s book History of Medicine and material provided by former Synapse editor Lynne Williams.

**Early 1960s—** The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, whose mission was to review and recommend sites in Western states for higher education institutions, designates the University of Nevada in Reno as the most likely facility that could support a new medical school.

**1965**—Dr. George T. Smith appointed to conduct a study on the feasibility of establishing a medical school in Nevada.

**1969**—Board of Regents approve feasibility study and it is adopted by the state Legislature.

**March 25, 1969**—Gov. Paul Laxalt signs Assembly Bill 130 into law to establish a two-year medical school for the Reno campus. Smith appointed first dean.

**Sept. 1971**—The School of Medical Sciences opens with nine full-time and five part-time faculty members, assisted by a large number of volunteer clinical faculty from the Reno community. The charter class had 32 members, including one woman. Teaching affiliations established at hospitals in Reno, Las Vegas, Henderson, Elko and Carson City.

**Spring 1972**—First building on the permanent campus completed and named after Dr. Fred M. Anderson, a prominent physician who worked to establish a Nevada medical school.

**Spring 1973**—The charter class completes its basic sciences, after taking the Part I examination of the National Board of Medical Examiners.

**1974**—The University of Nevada School of Medicine initiates an accredited program in continuing medical education, one of only two accredited programs in the country to encompass an entire state.

**April 14, 1977**—The Nevada State Legislature passes Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 18, approving the conversion of the medical school to a four-year, medical degree-granting institution.

**1979**—The Office of Rural Health is created to respond to the needs of rural Nevada.

**April 1980**—The Liaison Committee on Medical Education approves a two-year accreditation for the newly developed four-year program.

**May 1980**—The first class of 36 students from the four-year program graduates. School’s first residency program, in obstetrics and gynecology, established.

**1982**—Nutrition Education and Research program established by Sachiko St. Jeor, Ph.D.

May 1986—A seven-year accreditation for the School of Medicine is granted, the longest any medical school can be awarded.

1988—School’s genetics program established in both Las Vegas and Reno.

1989—Joseph Hume, Ph.D., discovers new chloride channels in the heart and is published in Science.

May 1989—History of Medicine program established by Dr. Anton Sohn.

1990—Drs. Trudy Larson and Steve Zell open an early intervention clinic for HIV-infected and AIDS patients at the Washoe County Health Department. The first operation, using the fetal cell transplantation technique pioneered by researcher Esmail Zanjani, Ph.D., is done to correct an enzyme deficiency in a developing fetus.

1992—The School of Medicine, in cooperation with Washoe Medical Center and the Veterans Affairs Medical Center, established the state’s first bone marrow transplant unit, directed by Dr. Joao Ascensao.

1993—Nevada is one of 14 medical schools nationally selected to receive the Robert Wood Johnson’s Generalist Initiative Award. The $750,000, three-year grant is used to modify the curriculum to include experience in the ambulatory setting and to attract increasing numbers of students who choose primary care careers.

1995—The School of Medicine is awarded $8.5 million by the National Institutes of Health to take part in a nationwide study of women’s health issues including breast cancer, heart disease and osteoporosis.

1995—Tom Kozel, Ph.D., receives the first of two consecutive five-year MERIT awards from National Institutes of Health. MERIT (Methods to Extend Research in Time) awards represent less than two percent of the entire NIH grant portfolio.

1996—Community based Northern Nevada HOPES (HIV Outpatient Program, Education and Services) clinic created.

May 1997—Nevada State Health Lab, built in 1977, is transferred to the School of Medicine from the State Division of Health.

1998—Hume receives MERIT grant from National Institutes of Health.

1999—Medical students establish a Student Outreach Clinic to provide care to indigent children as the students learn clinical skills. The clinic is a cooperative effort between the medical school, the Orvis School of Nursing, the School of Social Work and several health care agencies in Reno.

1999—The school’s trauma unit at University Medical Center accorded Level I status, putting it on par with trauma centers in Los Angeles, San Diego, Phoenix and Salt Lake City.

May 2002—Pennington Medical Education Building opens, named for casino owner William Pennington, who was a major contributor to the building.

2003—Nevada State Health Lab in Las Vegas opens; bioterrorism lab established at Clark County Health Department.

May 2006—School of Medicine’s Center for Bone Health opens in Reno.

Aug. 2007—School of Medicine matriculates its first expanded class of 62 students.

May 2008—School of Medicine’s Department of Surgery earns the first acute care surgery fellowship in the nation under the leadership of Dr. William Zamboni, department chair, and Dr. John Fildes, vice chair.

July 1, 2008—Division of Health Sciences established at University to create academic synergy among the School of Medicine, Orvis School of Nursing, School of Public Health, School of Social Work, Campus Wellness and Recreation, the Center for the Application of Substance Abuse Technologies, the Center for Program Evaluation, the Gerontology Academic Program and the Nevada Center for Ethics and Health Policies. Dr. John McDonald assumes the role of vice president of health sciences. Dr. Ole Thienhaus appointed dean of the School of Medicine.

Fall 2008—The basement of Building B on the University of Nevada Las Vegas Shadow Lane campus is repurposed for a combined medical and nursing clinical skills simulation center.

Dec. 2008—Construction begins on the Center for Molecular Medicine in Reno, the first new research building at the School of Medicine in nearly 30 years.

March 2009—School of Medicine observes 40 years of providing health care research, education and clinical care for Nevadans.

Summer 2009—Legislature and Governor Jim Gibbons provide $31 million in state funding to match $11 million in private funding for the new Health Sciences Building in Reno. Oncology fellowship established in Las Vegas.