School of Medicine expands training programs in urban and rural Nevada

Looking at the requirement to provide more physician training opportunities in Nevada, the University of Nevada School of Medicine formed three partnerships with hospitals earlier this year to help meet that need.

In May, the School of Medicine and Renown Health announced approval of an initial five-year plan to benefit northern Nevadans and significantly increase the number of physicians who train and practice in Nevada. The recommendations of a joint steering committee included the creation of a formal affiliation agreement between both organizations and a joint leadership team to guide and oversee the implementation of new medical educational and research programs at the School of Medicine’s Reno campus.

The Renown Health Board of Directors adopted the recommendations of the steering committee and committed $5 million in funding over the next three years, but success in achieving any goals ultimately will depend upon funding from the State of Nevada, private donors, grants and other sources of income available through the School of Medicine.

“The steering committee has been acutely aware of the extraordinary opportunity provided by this affiliation to transform medical care and medical education in northern Nevada through the creation of a full, four-year medical school campus and expanded student and resident teaching capacity,” says Thomas L. Schwenk, M.D., School of Medicine dean. “We’re committed to moving forward to implement new programs in ways that are ambitious, strategic and responsible.”

In addition to Schwenk and Don Sibery, then-interim CEO of Renown Health, the steering committee included Nevada System of Higher Education Chancellor Daniel Klaich ’72 (accounting), Board of Regents Chairman Kevin Page, Renown Health Board Chairman David Line and Renown Regional Medical Center Chair of the Board of Governors Blake Smith. Bruce James, president and CEO of Nevada New-Tech, Inc. and former National Institutes of Health Advisory Board chairman, served as committee chairman.

The new president and chief executive officer of Renown Health, Anthony Slonim, M.D., has picked up where Sibery left off, with a full commitment to this partnership.

While the School of Medicine and Renown have had an affiliation to train internal medicine and family medicine residents for many years, this collaboration magnifies that relationship by expanding medical student teaching capacity in partnership with community physicians.

A month later, MountainView Hospital and the School of Medicine formally agreed to work toward the development of an expanded Graduate Medical Education (GME) program based at MountainView Hospital in Las Vegas.

The expected start of the first residency program at MountainView Hospital could be as early as July 2016.

Preliminary discussions have focused on training programs in critically needed primary
care areas of internal medicine, family medicine and geriatrics, as well as general surgery, urology, neurology and selected medical and surgical subspecialties. The total program size of 150 additional resident positions, from the current 233 to 380 or more, will be developed over a five-year window.

“The announcement that MountainView Hospital and the University of Nevada School of Medicine have joined together to create an expanded GME program for Nevada is commendable,” says Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval ’86 (English). “I look forward to MountainView accepting its first residents and for the larger impact this will have on Nevada healthcare.”

Chris Mowan, CEO of MountainView Hospital. “We want to help grow the pipeline of new physicians, and we want them to stay in our community. Offering medical students more options for their residency will keep more physicians in Nevada and assist as we continue to elevate patient care in our community.”

Backed by research indicating that 60 percent of medical residents who train in Nevada remain in state to practice, the School of Medicine opened a new rural family medicine residency training program this summer in Winnemucca.

“I am delighted to announce the initial accreditation of this program that is in collaboration with the Las Vegas family medicine department and Humboldt General Hospital in Winnemucca. This is truly an achievement of momentous proportions and a great example of the statewide nature of the school,” says Miriam Bar-on, M.D., associate dean for graduate medical education.

The Accreditation Council for Graduate Medicine Education’s Review Committee commended the new residency program for “its demonstrated substantial compliance with the ACGME’s Institutional and/or program requirements for Graduate Medical Education without citations.”

Elissa Palmer, M.D., chair of the Las Vegas family medicine department, says such a commendation is rare for initial accreditations, and credits the team effort among School of Medicine leadership, her department, the administration and staff of Humboldt General Hospital and community doctors in Winnemucca for the program’s accreditation success.

Brad Granath, M.D., site director for the rural residency program at Humboldt General Hospital, says the need for the new program, which began on July 1, stems from the inability of the traditional family medicine residency model to produce doctors who are suited to practice in a rural setting, without convenient access to specialists commonly found in the metropolitan medical setting.

“Family doctors trained in the traditional manner become dependent on having a specialist immediately available to handle every problem,” Granath explains, adding that this convenience is not possible in rural areas that often lack medical specialists.

The rural family medicine track model has been around for 30 years and has been dramatically more successful in training doctors who are suited to practice in a rural setting, without convenient access to specialists commonly found in the metropolitan medical setting.

“I look forward to MountainView accepting its first residents and for the larger impact this will have on Nevada healthcare.”

Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval ’86

—Susan Hill, APR, and Anne McMillin, APR, are part of the Marketing & Communications Office for the School of Medicine.