Partnership and generous gift propel specialized care for northern Nevada

The University of Nevada School of Medicine is embarking on a strategic effort to reverse the state’s dismal health care delivery statistics and improve the health of all Nevadans.

The foundation of the school’s strategic plan is the development of a full four-year academic medical institution with complete Reno-based medical education to complement its selective statewide outreach. This goal will be possible through enhanced and expanded relationships with hospital partners, significant investments by donors and support from community physicians.

Already, concrete steps have been taken to achieve this next stage of growth.

With the goal of improving the health of children in northern Nevada, the Nell J. Redfield Foundation has pledged funding support in the amount of $900,000 over a five-year period beginning in 2015 for a distinguished pediatrician to serve jointly as Chair of Pediatrics at the School of Medicine and Pediatrician-in-Chief of Renown Children’s Hospital.

“The health and wellbeing of children in northern Nevada has long been a priority for the Redfield Foundation,” said foundation Director Jerry Smith ’03 (honorary degree).

“It is our hope that the partnership between the School of Medicine and Renown Health will improve the welfare of local children, our community’s most vulnerable population.”

The partnership grew from the need to greatly increase the number of physicians who practice in Nevada and was solidified by formal agreement in spring 2014. The collaborative goal to transform medical care and medical education in northern Nevada includes enlisting the critical support of physicians from Renown and the rest of Reno to participate as teachers at the medical school.

“Every great medical school has a deep and comprehensive relationship with a large, successful hospital and health system. The School of Medicine has that relationship in Reno with Renown Health,” explained Thomas L. Schwenk, M.D., dean of the School of Medicine and vice president for the Division
The Redfield gift to establish a joint pediatrics chair/pediatrician-in-chief at the School of Medicine and Renown Children’s Hospital will help promote the well-being of children in northern Nevada.

of Health Sciences, adding that the school has always benefited from a relationship with Renown that supports the training of residents in internal medicine, family medicine and psychiatry.

“Now we have an affiliation agreement that describes a far more robust relationship that will transform medical education in Reno and across northern Nevada. This agreement leads to the development of a full academic medical center, in which the medical school and Renown will create new clinical, teaching and research programs that will improve health and health care,” he said.

The joint pediatrics position, to be filled by a qualified candidate in mid-2015 following a nationwide search, represents the leadership needed to expand significantly the undergraduate and graduate medical education programs at the medical school while simultaneously serving as the clinical half of the dual leadership model, directing the expansion of services and being held accountable for medical outcomes, quality, education and physician relations at Renown Children’s Hospital.

“Generous support from the Redfield Foundation not only signifies their support of this crucial role within the medical community, but also their support of the vision of health care in our community,” said Anthony D. Slonim, M.D., DrPH, president and CEO of Renown Health. “A joint chair of pediatrics and pediatrician-in-chief truly marks the launch of a new era in the collaboration between the School of Medicine and Renown, and will improve medical care for children in our community and region through continued innovation and research.”

This joint position will lead to the recruitment of new pediatric subspecialists who will provide care not currently available for children in Reno and provide for the development of a training program for pediatricians in the future.

Another project in the works between the two institutions is the integration of the Renown Institute of Neurosciences into the School of Medicine as its Department of Neurology, with the goal of teaching neurology and developing a training program for neurologists who are in very short supply in Nevada.

“We are also developing a new Office of Community Faculty to support the many community physicians who want to contribute to medical student teaching,” Schwenk said. “We will also be integrating our clinical research programs and developing new support for scientists. The list of potential collaborations is almost endless, all of which will lead to new and better health care for Nevada.”

A major part of the strategy for improving health and health care in Nevada is the development of robust clinical research programs. Building upon the medical school’s history of strong basic science research, and the generous philanthropic support previously committed from the Nell J. Redfield Foundation and others, it will have the resources necessary to expand research with patients that will actually change the way medicine is practiced in Nevada.

During the past three decades, the Redfield Foundation has provided substantial support to the University, including the Redfield Campus, the William N. Pennington Health Sciences Building, the Nell J. Redfield Foundation Auditorium in the Davidson Mathematics and Science Center, the School of the Arts Act One project and the Morrill Hall restoration. The foundation has supported the School of Medicine Student Outreach Clinic and sports medicine fellowships and pledged significant support of research efforts at the School of Medicine.

With the support of the Nell J. Redfield Foundation, Renown Children’s Hospital added 16 private inpatient rooms to better accommodate pediatric patients and their families. Facility improvements for The Pregnancy Center, a service dedicated to providing accessible, high-quality, culturally sensitive, pre- and postnatal care to northern Nevada’s underserved, uninsured and underinsured pregnant women, were also made possible through additional support from the foundation.

Kimberley Fernandez, 6, is being treated for cystic fibrosis in Reno, thanks to the availability of a pediatric pulmonologist subspecialist.

**Pediatric subspecialist provides needed care to local child**

Five years ago, Washington resident Monica Fernandez received a frightening diagnosis for her 1-year-old daughter, Kimberly. Doctors said Kimberly had cystic fibrosis, a life-threatening genetic disease that primarily affects the lungs and digestive system.

With no family in the area to help and a limited income, the single mother moved to Reno so that Kimberly could receive the specialized care she needs for survival.

Fernandez found help for her daughter at Renown Children’s Hospital and Sonia Budhecha, M.D., a pediatric pulmonologist and former faculty member at the School of Medicine. A new partnership between Renown Health and the School of Medicine means more children like Kimberly will receive the care they need without traveling outside of northern Nevada.

Budhecha has helped both child and parent, addressing Fernandez’s concerns and providing care for Kimberly.

“Having Dr. Budhecha close by is very helpful and convenient,” Monica said. “I can call her day and night with any questions I might have and I can also set up an appointment with her any time I need. We moved here from Washington and this kind of care was not provided to me there. Her doctor was two hours away.”

—David Perez, Class of 2015