

Case Statement: Florida International University School of Medicine

The purpose of this document is to present the case for a state-supported medical school at Florida International University.

The population characteristics and health professional demographics of South Florida exacerbate significant health disparities.

According to the Institute Of Medicine, there is evidence linking poor health status to gaps in cultural understanding among physicians and other health care providers. South Florida has 5.3 million people, 49 percent of whom are Hispanic (US 2000 census); many speak only Spanish.

Although the physician-to-population ratio in South Florida is comparable to that of Florida and the nation, 44 percent of the physicians are foreign trained (compared to 24 percent) and a large percentage of physicians are not board certified. The quality of health care in South Florida is a concern.

To address these problems, South Florida needs a significant increase in bilingual, culturally competent, board-certified physicians and specialists in all fields to provide quality health care to all segments of the population.

Florida's medical schools can not provide enough physicians for South Florida.

The Association of American Medical Colleges' Physician Workforce Position Statement projects a major shortage of physicians by 2015 and recommends that entry level positions in both medical schools and residency positions should be increased. Since the capacity for current medical schools to expand class size is limited, the conclusion at a recent AAMC conference on physician workforce was that any solution to the physician shortage must include the development of new medical schools, particularly in areas with growing populations.

Increasing the class size of Florida's medical schools is not likely to have a significant impact on physician workforce in South Florida or the rest of the state. Again, according to the CEPRI Report as well as medical school reports to the Florida Board of Medicine 700 additional first-year medical student positions are needed to address the projected physician shortage in Florida, and the medical schools can increase class size no more than 225 students.

Florida's medical schools have not been successful in producing physicians for South Florida. The University of Miami has about 15 percent Hispanic students in its medical school classes, and only 17 percent of its graduates practice in Miami/Dade County. Fewer than four percent of the current medical workforce in South Florida are graduates of either the University of Florida or the University of South Florida. Only another medical school in South Florida can address these specific needs.

An increase in residency positions alone will not address the health care needs of South Florida.

Upon graduation from medical school, every physician must enter postgraduate training (residency) for 3 to 7 years, depending on the specialty. The United States has 45% more first-year residency positions than the number of US medical school graduates. As a result, these excess positions are filled by medical school graduates who trained in other countries. Developing new residency programs without simultaneously increasing the number of US-trained medical school graduates would simply provide more positions to be filled by international medical graduates.

Since residency programs in South Florida cannot attract enough US graduates to fill their programs, approximately 50 percent of the residents in South Florida residency programs are international medical graduates. Consequently, since most physicians practice in the general area where they do their residency, the percentage of South Florida physicians who are international graduates is increasing.

In order to increase the number of physicians in Florida, an increase in the number of residency positions has been recommended in the CEPRI Report. This approach may be helpful in the long run, but since the number of residency positions already far exceeds the number of US medical school graduates, an increase in residency positions would result only in an increase in international medical graduates in those positions. There are already 1.96 times more residency positions (1014) in Florida each year than there are medical school graduates (517). An increase in the number of residency positions will be appropriate when the number of medical school graduates in South Florida increases to fill the number of first-year positions.

The Solution:

A medical school at Florida International University that educates high quality, culturally competent physicians to practice in South Florida.

What South Florida needs is an increase in medical students who are willing to stay in South Florida for their residencies and therefore stay in South Florida to practice.

Florida International University, more than any other university in the nation, is in a unique position to fill this need. Currently, more than 50 percent of FIU's students are Hispanic, 14 percent are African/American and 80 percent remain in South Florida after graduation. Ninety percent of the nursing graduates stay in South Florida. This student base is the pipeline that can satisfy the need for more bilingual, culturally competent, board-certified, high quality physicians.

There is a direct relationship between medical schools and residency training programs.

Medical education is an integrated continuum that encompasses medical school, residency training in a specialty, and continuing or life-long learning for practicing physicians. When the pipeline of Florida International University physicians has been established, the University will work with regional hospitals and clinics establish additional residency programs. The newly established residency programs will be affiliated with the new medical school, and the faculty of the medical school will provide instruction and clinical training for the residents.

Several major South Florida hospitals are interested in developing new residency programs in conjunction with the proposed FIU medical school and have the patient base and technology resources to do so. While there are free-standing and branch residency training programs in the United States, quality and economies of scale can be achieved

by linking medical school and residency training. The same medical school faculty will also provide continuing medical education to practicing physicians in the area.

The South Florida community supports a medical school at FIU.

In addition to the entire University community, its administration and faculty, there is a great deal of interest, momentum and support for a new medical school. Several major donors have made financial commitments to facilitate the development of an FIU School of Medicine. With private pledges and state matching funds, \$40 million has been generated for the proposed new school. Facility planning for a new life sciences building is underway. The Beacon Council, the Miami-Dade economic development partnership, has resolved to support the school; the annual economic impact of the school is projected to be \$784 million, including the creation of 11,249 new jobs. Several other foundations, agencies and professional groups have backed the proposed school.

Summary

If South Florida, with its unique demography, is to address its health care needs, only Florida International University, with its unique student base, is in a position to make an impact.

FIU's students *are* the pipeline for a new medical school that will produce the quality physicians who will remain in South Florida to specialize and to practice.