

# PENNSYLVANIA STATE BOARD OF MEDICINE



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## Four New Medical Schools

For the first time since 1981, four newly accredited medical schools opened their doors last fall to their initial classes. At first glance, the four schools may seem to have little in common, but a closer look reveals shared philosophies and commitments to issues such as improving health care access in their local communities.

Before the four new schools—the Texas Tech University Paul L. Foster School of Medicine, Florida International University (FIU) Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine, the University of Central Florida (UCF) College of Medicine, and **The Commonwealth Medical College** (TCMC) in Scranton — only two schools in the previous 25 years had been accredited by the Liaison Commission on Medical Education. With each school being a product of the same era, they all point to similar factors that helped shape their visions and definitions of success — the quality movement, an increasingly diverse population, and a predicted physician workforce shortage.

M. Brownell Anderson, senior director for educational affairs at the AAMC, said a shared focus on health in the schools' communities is an "exciting development" that came about in part because of a predicted physician shortage, particularly among primary care specialties. "There has been recognition that we need more general medicine physicians who will be able to care for an aging and culturally diverse population," Anderson said.

The Foster School of Medicine, located in the border town of El Paso, Texas, intends to help ease a regional physician shortage while responding to the health needs of the area's large immigrant population. According to school data, El Paso has an average of 110 physicians for every 100,000 residents, compared with a national average of 198 physicians per 100,000 people.

"Our area is one of the most underserved areas not only in Texas, but in the nation, and we certainly are anticipating that having our own four-year medical school here will spawn the development of future doctors for our region,"

said Manuel Schydlower, M.D., the school's associate dean for admissions and professor of pediatrics.

To better mesh with the immigrant community, the school's 40 students are participating in a Spanish language immersion program that includes visits to community health clinics, Schydlower said. Thomas Tullius, a first-year Foster student and El Paso native, is planning to stay local after earning his M.D. degree.

"It was just very exciting that the city I grew up in was going to have its own medical school," said Tullius. "We're doing things that will help our own community here."

In the state of Florida, a population that is both growing and aging, coupled with what was previously a relatively small medical education infrastructure, meant that a physician shortage was a real possibility. FIU and UCF were both created partly in response to increasing concerns that patient demand would outstrip doctor supply.

A program at FIU called the Neighborhood Health, Education and Learning Program, or Neighborhood HELP, was created to address urgent health care needs in some of Miami's most vulnerable populations. Beginning in their first year, FIU medical students will be paired with nursing, social work, and public health students, as well as a faculty adviser, in an integrated effort to track and monitor the health of a family in an ethnically diverse neighborhood. Students will work with the same household until they graduate. The communities participating in the program were "very excited because they saw how the school would, in the process of training medical students, be a solution to

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some of the issues they had,” said FIU Founding Dean and Senior Vice President for Medical Affairs John A. Rock, M.D.

Laying the groundwork for the program was a challenge, Rock added, because FIU staff had to coordinate with other local organizations, including religious groups and fire and police departments. As the program gets off the ground, school officials said the top challenge is ensuring that progress is properly benchmarked so that the school can accurately measure the program’s effectiveness.

“The important thing is we’re making a commitment to the neighborhood to work with them and integrate many of the health services they need in a way that will be meaningful to them and hopefully improve their quality of life,” Rock said.

FIU student Patricio Lau said he was attracted to the college in part because of the Neighborhood HELP program. “Miami needs a lot of community health. FIU has a great program for the needs of the community,” said Lau.

A lack of physicians and continuity within the health care system inspired **The Commonwealth Medical College’s** leaders to build a pipeline of physicians and help integrate the region’s health care system by establishing physician networks. Beginning in their first year, TCMC students will be assigned to a family to provide continuity of care and also will work with community groups to understand health care concerns in the region, Debra E. Stalk, M.P.H., director of admissions, said. In recruiting the school’s first class, Stalk said officials sought students who were “not only academically stellar” but who also had a “true commitment to service.”

To bolster the school’s community-centered mission, the school’s founders chose to make it an independent institution not connected to a university, said Robert H. D’Alessandri, M.D., dean and president.

“We were concerned that when you’re part of a university, the university’s mission becomes more the predominant mission and that might take away from the community focus,” he said. Yet, TCMC’s status as a freestanding institution created its own set of obstacles—including the fact that there was no existing faculty to help develop the school’s policies and curriculum. As a result, TCMC consulted with faculty at other universities in the region and with area clinicians in curriculum development, admissions, promotion, and tenure, D’Alessandri said.

Communities, businesses, and health care leaders in the region are funding scholarships worth \$20,000 annually for all students in TCMC’s charter class. The scholarship will “give students more opportunity, more choice” by reducing their educational debt, D’Alessandri said, adding that high debt loads among medical students sometimes “directs them toward specialties that compensate more, and away from primary care.”

In Orlando, Fla., the community rallied behind UCF by raising funds to provide each member of the charter class with a full scholarship covering tuition, fees, and living expenses for all four years of medical school. Deborah German, M.D., dean of the college, received a similar scholarship when she attended medical school and worked with community sponsors in the Orlando area to provide the same opportunity to the charter students. “When I found myself in this role as dean of a new medical school it seemed the perfect opportunity to amplify the gift that was given to me,” German said.

According to Rel Larkin, UCF director of admissions, the curriculum, which integrates basic and clinical sciences throughout a student’s four years, is one of the most unique things about the college. UCF also has partnerships with the animation industry in the Orlando area to incorporate animation and simulation training and patient mannequin simulators into the curriculum. One school facility scheduled to open in spring 2010 will include 5,000 square feet of space dedicated solely to animation and simulation training. Although the curriculum is one of UCF’s strengths, it also presents some challenges, Larkin said.

“I think since this type of curriculum has not been taught a whole lot, the students are going to have to go through a process of understanding it,” Larkin said. “With the curriculum being new, there’s always going to be a need for change and tweaking.”

UCF student Matt Dean said the ability to pave the way for future students was a major factor in his decision to attend UCF. “We’re going to have a lot of say in building traditions. We’re going to be able to give a lot of feedback and things like that are exciting to me because I relish the opportunity to start something new,” Dean said. “I think there are a lot of cool things about being the first class, building the relationships, and setting up the program.”

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