Growing the Physician Workforce in Kansas: KU School of Medicine Wichita and Salina Campus Expansions

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Despite several successful educational programs such as the Kansas Medical Student Loan program, Kansas continues to experience a shortage of rural physicians. The state is below the U.S. average for physicians per 100,000 people and especially for primary care physicians per 100,000 people.\(^1\) According to recent research, the state also suffers a severe mal-distribution of physicians, with low physician-to-population ratios in five of six major geographic regions.\(^2\) Demand for care will rise as access increases with health care reform; Kansans are aging so they’ll need more care; and many Kansas physicians are nearing retirement. With medical training taking at least seven years from the first year of medical school through residency training, the time for expanding KU School of Medicine class sizes is now.

To help grow the rural physician workforce, the University of Kansas School of Medicine has added a new, innovative four-year campus in Salina and expanded the Wichita campus from its current two years of clinical training in years three and four to a full four years while expanding class sizes. The first classes will begin training on both campuses in July 2011. These expansions will help achieve the critical goal of providing additional physicians to underserved areas of the state.

**Wichita expansion**

Previously, all KU School of Medicine students spent their initial two years of training at the Kansas City campus before about a third of them moved to Wichita for two more years of hands-on, clinical training. The Wichita expansion will provide students with the opportunity to spend *all four years* on the Wichita campus with plans to eventually increase graduating class sizes to 75 from about 55 on the Wichita campus. A recent study found that the annual economic impact of this expansion on the Wichita community will increase from $49.7 million to about $80 million (including both the expansion of the School of Medicine and the KU School of Pharmacy).

Expansion of these programs would not have been possible without KU’s strong partnerships in both communities. As a community-based campus, KU School of Medicine –Wichita partners with Robert J. Dole VA Medical Center, Via Christi

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1. Association of American Medical Colleges “2009 State Physician Workforce Data Book”
Health and Wesley Medical Center, as well as more than 900 volunteer faculty members in Wichita and throughout the state. Discussions are underway to share resources, such as lab space, as well as personnel with Wichita State University and possibly Newman University as well as the KU School of Pharmacy-Wichita. Classroom and office space for the first- and second-year medical students will be in the 2nd-floor addition that will also be home to the new KU School of Pharmacy-Wichita. With a $5 million fund-raising goal, the Wichita Campus has already received $2.8 million in gifts and commitments from the Kansas Health Foundation, Via Christi Health, Wesley Medical Center, prominent alumni and many more. A group of medical, business, and civic leaders who are supportive of the KU School of Medicine-Wichita expansion has recently been formed – 4-Wichita – and will educate the community, region and state on the benefits of KU-SOM Wichita campus expansion.

**Salina expansion**

Building upon its successful Rural Track program, the KU School of Medicine will now allow students to complete all four years of medical training in Salina. William Cathcart-Rake, MD, FACP, has been named director of the KU School of Medicine-Salina.

In a unique model designed to increase the number of students ultimately entering rural practices, each class of eight students will receive training in space provided by the Salina Regional Health Center. Technology will aid the program’s curriculum – lectures will be available via interactive television and podcasts, and web-based systems will support laboratory components.

KU will similarly capitalize on strong relationships in Salina, where it operates a highly successful 12-person residency program at Smoky Hill. KU has partnered philanthropically in Salina with the Salina Regional Health Foundation, the Salina Regional Health Center and local prominent alumni, and has established a KU School of Medicine–Salina Dean’s Club. Salina Regional Health Center has donated renovated space for the program to operate, and KU will also partner with Kansas Wesleyan University to operate anatomy labs.

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