Graduate Medical Education: Strategy for Addressing Physician Shortages in Georgia

Georgia Regents University’s effort to expand undergraduate and graduate medical education in Georgia is focused on providing more physicians in a time where there is a national shortage.

Graduate Medical Education (GME)
Graduate Medical Education is the clinical training that follows graduation from medical school. Referred to as residency, it typically lasts three years and provides new physicians training under experienced physicians in hospital settings. Most of this training occurs in hospitals that usually care for a high proportion of indigent and uninsured patients. Nationally and in Georgia, we have expanded medical student training slots while residency slots have lagged behind (see figure 1 at right).

Financing GME
The federal government provides a large share of costs associated with GME. Cuts to this funding will stress the ability of teaching hospitals to sustain high quality physician training programs. Georgia ranks 39th in the nation for residents per 100,000 people. The vast majority of Georgia’s residency positions, approximately 75 percent, are administered by two institutions, Emory with 1,181 slots and GRU with 453.

Increasing Georgia’s GME slots
Only one third of Georgia’s medical students match with a Georgia based-residency program. Statistics show that physicians are much more likely to stay and practice in the state where they do their residency, thus Georgia is losing physicians to other states. Practicing physicians generate economic returns in the range of $1.5 to $1.6 million annually per physician in the communities they serve. The University System of Georgia Board of Regents, which oversees strategic investments in health professions education, has recommended the following:

- Adding 400 new residency slots in Georgia, bringing Georgia up to par with the southeastern United States for per capita rate of residents New programs are now being developed at St. Mary's, Gwinnett Medical Center, Athens Regional and the Southwest Georgia Medical Education and Research Consortium. Developments are other hospitals are pending.
- Focusing on creating new residency positions, which can capture new Medicare GME dollars
- Focusing on the development of primary care specialties

As one of the most rapidly growing states in the nation, Georgia does not have an adequate number of GME slots to ensure that we have the volume of new physicians required to meet the health needs of Georgians. It is vital that we increase partnerships, funding, and opportunities to find solutions.

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