Medical Education in Idaho: Saint Alphonsus Perspectives

Saint Alphonsus' Current Support of Medical Education Efforts

Current and looming shortages of primary care physicians, nurses and other allied health professions pose a significant threat to an adequate supply of health care for Idaho's growing and aging population. Saint Alphonsus has partnered with other hospitals and institutions of higher learning to bolster the healthcare workforce to meet future needs. Saint Alphonsus support and contributions toward medical education include the following:

- Family Medicine Residency of Idaho (WWAMI): Saint Alphonsus provides approximately $1.4 million in annual financial and in-kind support
- Psychiatric Residency (WWAMI): Saint Alphonsus initiated discussions to create this much-needed residency since the entire state of Idaho is a Health Professional Shortage Area for Psychiatry. Saint Alphonsus, St. Luke's and Boise VA Medical Center committed to contribute over $300,000 annually toward operating costs, with the State of Idaho contributing approximately $113,000 annually. This program just launched in Summer 2008 and there are Psychiatry residents now in Boise seeing patients.
- Dental Residency (ISU): Saint Alphonsus provided $257,000 in support last year.
- Nursing Education: SARMC is contributing $1 million over 10 years to expand BSU's nursing building, also contributing approximately $72,000/year to support nursing programs at BSU, NNU and ISU
- Saint Alphonsus is an important clinical training site for many high-demand health occupations. In FY07, Saint Alphonsus was a clinical training site for:
  - 412 Nursing students and Emergency Medical Technicians
  - 26 Family practice residents
  - 15 Pharmacy students, residents and interns
  - 8 Physical therapy students
  - 15 Radiology students

Recruitment/Retention of Physicians

According to a 2005 physician needs assessment by AmeriMed Consulting, Saint Alphonsus needs to recruit 83 physicians within our primary service area to serve the growing population (27 primary care, 10 hospital based, 32 medical specialties, and 14 surgical specialties). Notably, these projections do not account for any physician retirement, so actual needs are higher. Total estimated cost to recruit all 83 physicians was $8.3 million). Average cost to recruit a primary care physician is $85,000 – average cost to recruit a specialist is $110,000.

Over the past two years, a total of 24 physicians have been recruited to Saint Alphonsus, including 3 new trauma surgeons. Included in the above total, Saint Alphonsus has recruited approximately 16 new primary care physicians (internal medicine, family practice, pediatrics and OB) in the past year and lost four. Recruiting and retaining primary care physicians to meet community need remains a top priority for Saint Alphonsus.

There is a severe shortage of internists whose practices often include seniors. Saint Alphonsus is aggressively recruiting internists, but in the meantime, one of our top priorities is exploring a possible senior specific clinic using midlevel providers with support from internal medicine specialists.

Suggested Actions

Saint Alphonsus supports the following immediate actions to increase Idaho's supply of primary care physicians:

- Increase residency capacity to accommodate more family medicine residents, and explore developing an internal medicine residency program in Idaho (critically needed)
- Purchase additional seats in neighboring states' medical schools (WWAMI, Utah, Nevada, Oregon), and consider developing a "payback" policy that would require Idaho students to practice for 3-5 years in Idaho after they complete their residency training or pay back the amount of tuition assistance they received from the state
- Consider tax incentive for physicians in needed specialties (family medicine, internal medicine, etc.) to relocate to Idaho, similar to tax incentives provided to other businesses to start up in Idaho

Saint Alphonsus has not had the opportunity to review the full proposals for implementing an in-state medical school, either through a distributive model, expanding the current WWAMI program, or a joint medical school. Once these proposals are made available for our review, analysis will be done to determine which long-term solutions are favored by Saint Alphonsus and any recommendations we might have.