Primary Care Preceptorship Programs Work to Build the Physician Workforce Texas Needs

Texas continues to produce too few general internists, general pediatricians, and family physicians to meet the needs of its citizens, particularly those in rural and underserved areas. While study after study shows ready access to these physicians produces higher levels of health for less cost, nearly 5.8 million Texans — almost one in four — live in primary care health professional shortage areas.

To have an efficient and effective health care system, Texas needs more primary care physicians, but for various reasons fewer medical students are choosing these careers.

- The Council on Graduate Medical Education recently reported that fewer than 20% of U.S. medical school graduates plan to enter primary care.
- A 2008 JAMA study showed that only 2% of medical students intended to practice general internal medicine, 4.9% planned to practice family medicine, and 11.7% planned to practice general pediatrics.

Early Exposure to Primary Care Practice Makes the Difference

In the ’80s and ’90s, the Texas Legislature recognized the need to support the state’s primary care workforce by providing medical students the chance to experience the joy and fulfillment of practicing primary care by creating three statewide preceptorship programs, the General Internal Medicine Statewide Preceptorship Program, the Texas Statewide Family Medicine Preceptorship Program, and the General Pediatric Preceptorship Program, all of which were funded through the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. These programs placed thousands of medical students in primary care clinics for 4-week internships with remarkable results.

- A 9-year study of Texas medical students showed that those who participated in a family medicine preceptorship were almost twice as likely to pursue a career in family medicine as those who didn’t.
- Of the 238 medical students who completed family medicine preceptorships in 2009, 93% said the experience made them more receptive to primary care as a career.
- From 1999 to 2006, more than 1,400 medical students completed a general internal medicine preceptorship; 40.6% of them enrolled in an internal medicine residency program, 26.4% of them intended to practice primary care, and 82% of them intended to stay in Texas.
- From 1999 to 2009, almost 1,400 medical students completed a pediatric preceptorship; 37% of them entered a pediatric residency, and 62% stayed in Texas.
PARTICIPATION AND FUNDING FOR TEXAS’ PRIMARY CARE PRECEPTORSHIP PROGRAMS

Cuts and then the elimination of the programs’ funding have caused participation to drop by about 85%

The Primary Care Coalition is a partnership comprised of the Texas Academy of Family Physicians, the Texas Pediatric Society, and the Texas Chapter of the American College of Physicians.

A Small Investment in Primary Care Preceptorships Will Pay Huge Dividends

Studies of the Texas preceptorship programs and similar programs in other states indicate that putting medical students in rotations with primary care physicians works. These programs help increase the number of primary care physicians our state can produce. But in 2011, the Legislature eliminated their funding.

• Before 2003, the programs received about $2 million per biennium. For the 2004-2005 biennium they were cut in half.

• After sustaining a series of cuts over the following legislative sessions, funding for the programs was eliminated in 2011.

• Thanks to the diligence and determination of Texas’ primary care leaders, the programs have continued to operate, but with no state funding, their capacity and effectiveness have been greatly diminished.

• In 2003, almost 800 medical students completed rotations with primary care physicians through the preceptorship programs. This year, only about 100 medical students could participate.

The Texas Primary Care Coalition respectfully requests that the Texas Legislature restore funding for the Texas Primary Care Preceptorship Programs with a $4 million appropriation through the Higher Education Coordinating Board.

$4 million is a tiny fraction of the state budget, but it could make a tremendous difference to the foundation of the state’s health care delivery system.

The Primary Care Coalition is a partnership comprised of the Texas Academy of Family Physicians, the Texas Pediatric Society, and the Texas Chapter of the American College of Physicians.