Federal Message

THE NEED: More medical residents in Eastern and Central Washington leading to more primary care physicians in Eastern and Central Washington

• Medical residents are funded by the federal government. Washington State has 1600 residency positions, with 110 located in Central and Eastern Washington. We need more residencies in on this side of the state. We also need more physicians.

• More than 500,000 people in Washington State are newly insured through our state’s health insurance exchange marketplace and Medicaid expansion. Stories abound of patients who cannot find a primary care provider who is accepting new patients.

• In addition to the growing number of patients accessing the health care system, the large number of retiring providers and an aging population combine to make the need for more physicians greater than ever.

• Using current physician per capita benchmarks, by 2030 Washington would need to add more than 4,200 physicians to the provider workforce to meet our state’s health care needs.

• Nationally, since 49% of physicians practice where they did their residencies, having more residencies in underserved communities is vitally important. The Spokane region retains 65% of the residents from the Family Medicine and Internal Medicine residencies; 83% from the rural training track.

A NEW PARTNERSHIP: The Spokane Teaching Health Consortium

• Prior to 2013, Providence Health Care was the sole sponsor for graduate medical education (GME), or residencies, in Spokane, with capped Medicare positions assisting Providence in the overall cost of training residents. For many years Spokane’s Family Medicine and Internal Medicine residences have operated adjacent clinics in the 5th & Browne Medical Building, serving 35,000 underinsured patient/year.

• A consortium formed in 2013 whose members (Empire Health Foundation, Providence Health Care and Washington State University Spokane) successfully applied for a federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant.

July 14, 2016
• The purpose of the grant was to expand GME in the Spokane region through the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education program and improve access to health care in the Inland Northwest. Teaching Health Centers are community-based, ambulatory patient care centers that operate primary care residency programs from family and internal medicine to pediatrics, obstetrics-gynecology, psychiatry, geriatrics and general and pediatric dentistry. There are currently 60 HRSA-supported teaching health centers training 690 residents in 24 states.

• The HRSA grant supported the hiring of six new residents (three in family medicine and three in internal medicine) who started July 1, 2014, and a second class of six residents in July, 2015. The STHC Board will vote on recruitment of a third class in November, 2015. If approved, it would bring our residency count to 98 residents. This growth represents a significant increase in a very short amount of time.

• Ultimately, and with funding, the STHC’s goal is to grow GME in Spokane by nearly 60% to 125 residents in five years as an answer to the growing primary care physician shortage in rural areas.

• In September 2014, WSU Board of Regents approved a $16.25 million bond sale to fund construction of a new clinic on WSU Spokane’s campus.

• The clinic will provide space for collaborative care by incorporating the medical residents who currently provide clinic services in the 5th & Browne building, medical, nursing and pharmacy students, and EWU physical and occupational therapy and social work students. Construction began in May 2015, with the opening in 2016.

SOLUTION: Increase residency positions through increased funding

• Because one of the most significant factors affecting where providers will practice is where they completed their residency, expanding the number of local residency positions is a strategy to solving our area’s physician shortage.

• Currently only 7% of our state’s residency positions are located in Eastern and Central Washington. Additional funding is needed to grow the number of residency positions.

• The HSRA funding is continued until September 30, 2017, but at a reduced per resident amount of $95,000. This amount covers only the residents’ salaries and benefits.

• Lack of funding will result in the loss of primary care physician training in Spokane.

For additional information, contact:
Nancy Vorhees (509) 999-3833 | vorheen@inhs.org