

Dean of Western Michigan University medical school says it must reflect profession's new demands

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By **Margaret DeRitter | Kalamazoo Gazette**



Gazette file

Dr. Hal Jenson, right, dean of the Western Michigan University medical school, is shown with Dr. Tom George during a reception in February welcoming Jenson to Kalamazoo.

KALAMAZOO — The practice of medicine has become much more challenging and complex in recent years and is forcing changes in how doctors are trained. And those changes must be reflected in the curriculum that is developed for the planned medical school at Western Michigan University.

That was the message that the dean of the school, Dr. Hal Jenson, brought to about 70 of his fellow doctors Tuesday night as he spoke to members of the Kalamazoo Academy of Medicine at the Kalamazoo Country Club.

Jenson also asked for their help in making the medical school a success. "Having community physicians involved is critical," he said.

Jenson and others working on the curriculum have a pretty tight timeline. They are planning to enroll the first class in 2014, but that means the school must be accredited by 2012 and its application must be completed right after Jan. 1, 2012.

"We have lots of questions to answer in just six months," Jenson said.

As a curriculum is developed, it will need to emphasize critical thinking, evidence-based medicine, skills training through simulations, small groups in which students learn from each other, and assessments of students based on competency rather than how much time has passed in their education, Jenson said.

"We have to train students to think because they are not going to be able to look up answers in a textbook," he said.

It will also be important to emphasize interpersonal skills, teamwork, ethics and professionalism, he said. "We talk about respect, but we tolerate physicians in the operating room throwing instruments at the charge nurse," Jenson said. "We have to walk the talk."

When the audience had a chance to ask questions, Dr. Krishna Jain commented that "most medical students we get don't know anatomy." He wanted to know how the new school will ensure that aspiring surgeons are well versed in the basics.

"I'm going to start by asking you to be one of the faculty members," Jenson responded.

"You pay me enough, I'll do it," Jain shot back.

A question about the economics of medical education prompted Jenson to say that the average medical student graduates with just under \$200,000 worth of debt. He said he is concerned that a portion of the population is prevented from considering medical school because of the cost and that he hopes the WMU medical school can provide scholarships for deserving students. "It would be wonderful to have something like an extension of The Kalamazoo Promise," he said.

Dr. Earl Norman, program director of general surgery at Michigan State University/Kalamazoo Center for Medical Studies, said that the number of medical students being trained in Michigan has doubled in recent years and that he is concerned there will not be enough residency opportunities for graduates.

Jenson acknowledged this is a major problem. "The number of residency spots is not going up," he said. "The group most likely to be displaced is the international medical student. I don't know what the answer is going to be."

But he said the answer is not to slow down on training medical students, since the country needs more doctors, particularly primary-care doctors. "We have to attack the other problem" and try to gain more funding to increase the number of residencies, he said.

In an interview after the program, Norman said federal funding for graduate medical education has not been increased since 1996 and that the issue was not addressed in the new health-care-reform law. But he said he is happy about the prospect of having a medical school in Kalamazoo.

"I think in the long run it's going to be a value added to the community," Norman said. "Now we're affiliated with Michigan State, and it's a good affiliation. But the lack of proximity to Lansing hurts us in terms of basic science and research opportunities."

A medical school in Kalamazoo could help attract better candidates for medical education and provide stronger curriculum and faculty development. "We're trained as doctors, not Ph.D. educators," he said.

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