

Enough residency spots for new doctors?

WMU announces plans for new school Tuesday

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- By Anne Schieber

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (WOOD) - Will there be enough residency programs to accommodate Michigan's medical school graduates?

Adding a **new medical school at Western Michigan University** could affect graduates in becoming full-fledged doctors, as they complete clinical training and obtain licenses.

Keven Dazy and Joel Krauss are set to graduate from medical school in the spring, and last week, the pair learned they would be completing their residency at the University of Michigan in pediatrics and emergency medicine.

"That was our No. 1 choice," Dazy said.

Said Krauss: "I was a little bit worried about the competitive programs, but I was never worried about not having a spot to go to."

But finding a residency program -- let alone a first choice -- might not be so easy in the future. U.S. medical schools are graduating about 25 percent more students.

"The decision to expand medical schools was taken without enough attention being paid to what happens after medical school," said Peter Coggan, M.D., of Grand Rapids Medical Education Partners.

Through Medicare, the federal government pays for residency training. The process costs about \$9.5 billion per year.

"In this tough economic climate, it's difficult to free up additional funds to put into the Medicare program to fund more positions," Coggan said.

Currently, about 700 medical students graduate in the state each year. With Western Michigan adding a school and new programs at Central Michigan and Oakland University (tied to the William Beaumont School of Medicine in the Detroit area), that number could jump to 1,000 by 2014.

"It's going to be very hard to offer all those Michigan kids to complete their residency training in the state, and we're running the risk of losing them," Coggan said.

Studies show medical students typically practice within 150 miles of where they do their clinical training. Michigan projects a shortage of 4,500 doctors within nine years.

According to the National Resident Matching Program, the organization that matches medical school graduates, there were 20,121 U.S. Medical Degree and Doctor of Osteopathy applicants competing for 23,421 spots.

Medical students from other countries also compete for these spots, as well as residents looking to change their specialty training.

Some hospitals are funding their own residency programs, with the hope that the hospitals will become more efficient in training doctors with the money they're already receiving.

This residency shortage isn't only stressful for communities, but also for medical students -- who typically carry a debt of about \$150,000 and will want to finish their training to finalize the doctor process.

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