WMU Medical School moves its entire family medicine residency to Kalamazoo Family Health Center

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KALAMAZOO, MI – While the WMU Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine just completed work on its new downtown campus in June, its family medicine residents have moved into a different home: the Kalamazoo Family Health Center.

As of July 1, 25 exam rooms at the center at 117 W. Paterson St. are now dedicated to WMed faculty and residents. Patients at FHC will still have access to primary medical care, walk-in clinics, dental care, behavioral health services, lab services, pharmacy, WIC and other sub-specialties.

The partnership, which was finalized this month, has been five years in the making. Representatives of both organizations call the move a "win, win," saying it will allow the Family Health Center to double its capacity to treat underserved patients in the Kalamazoo area and will give the WMed residents more experience treating a wider population, some of whom have complex medical needs.

"We are extremely excited about the partnership and having the whole thing come to fruition," said Denise Crawford, president and CEO of the Kalamazoo Family Health Center, in a phone interview. "It's a wonderful opportunity to provide exceptional care for our patients and increase access. We knew it would be a phenomenal learning opportunity for the residents."

Crawford said that the idea for the partnership began in 2009, when the Family Health Center applied for and received a $10.3 million grant from the federal government to expand. The second floor was built with the WMed partnership as the goal, she said.

"The entire second floor was built and designed for the residency practice. It's new and exciting for the community, but we've been planning it since 2009," Crawford said, estimating that the partnership with WMed will double the FHC's capacity to treat adult patients. "It will significantly increase our capacity to serve patients. There's always more need than availability."

Crawford said the Family Health Center will continue to staff its own doctors, whom patients can choose to see. And moving the family medicine residency over to FHC does not mean patients will be getting inferior care, she said.

Medical residents are doctors who have already received their medical degrees and are now focusing on their area of
specialty.

"We believe it's better care," Crawford said, adding that patients will be seen by two doctors instead of one.

The family medicine faculty and residents have had a presence at Kalamazoo County's Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) for more than five years, said Laura Eller, director of communications. At that time, what was then known as the Michigan State University/Kalamazoo Center for Medical Studies began a collaborative arrangement with the FHC, offering an obstetrics clinic twice weekly, which was staffed by residents and Dr. Michael Clarke, a faculty member.

After the expansion was completed in 2012, WMU's faculty began staffing a part-time clinic for family medicine patients.

"We have been down there for a while in some fashion. It's been a long time coming," Eller said in a phone interview. "It seemed like a good fit. We've had a clinic there for several years. ... It helps with the staffing, helps with continuity of care, helps with resident instruction. It just felt like a natural for us to be more of a player."

Eller estimated that, between the faculty and the residents, there would be about 40 people from the medical school based at Family Health Center. An advantage for patients, she said, is that, because of the medical school's affiliation with the two local hospitals, the Family Health Center now will be able to offer continuity of care if a patient needs to be admitted to Bronson or Borgess.

"It's a very good bonus for both the Family Health Center and for us," she said. "It creates better in-patient admission for continuity of care."

The medical school will continue to staff its clinic on Oakland Drive, Eller said, which will still offer programs including family medicine, orthopedics, the pediatric clinic, endocrinology and its infectious disease clinic.

The bottom line, Eller said: "It allows us to take care of more patients."

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