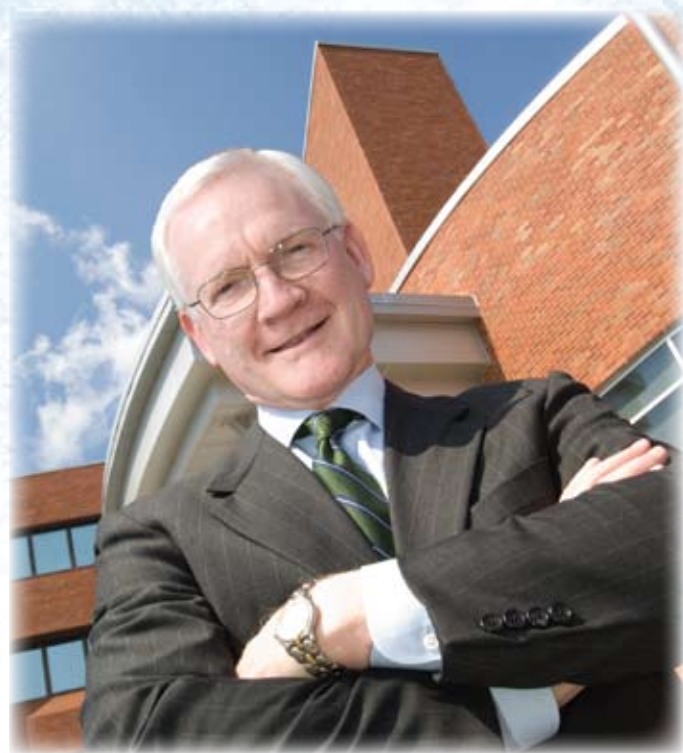


Northwest Bound

Satellite campus will accommodate more students – and inspire careers in primary care



Peter Kohler, M.D., is coordinating the conversion of the former Washington Regional Hospital into a satellite UAMS campus.

This time next year, a small group of College of Medicine (COM) juniors could be immersed in clinical training and classes some 190 miles from UAMS' Little Rock campus. If all goes well, they'll be the first medical students at a UAMS satellite campus.

UAMS-Northwest will work with physicians and area hospitals to provide the essential clinical sites and patients that the COM needs in order to educate and train larger classes and more residents.

Renovations are beginning this fall on the old Washington Regional Hospital in Fayetteville to convert it into a campus that will help UAMS address shortfalls of health care professionals. At full enrollment, the campus will have more than 300 students and residents, including students in medical, pharmacy, graduate nursing and allied health programs. The UAMS Area Health Education Center (AHEC) in Fayetteville also is moving into the building.

As the COM incrementally increases the freshman class from 160 to 200 students, the additional students progressing through

medical school each year will come to Northwest Arkansas for their third-year clinical rotations and fourth-year electives. The pilot group next fall likely will include about five juniors.

"There is a lot to be done before those first students walk through the door," said Peter O. Kohler, M.D., UAMS' vice chancellor for the Northwest Arkansas Region. "But this campus is vital to our ability to ensure access to quality health care for Arkansans in the decades ahead, and we are optimistic that we can do this."

UAMS Chancellor I. Dodd Wilson, M.D., recruited Kohler to head development of the satellite campus in early 2007. (Read more about Kohler on page 6.)

Why Northwest Arkansas

UAMS leaders studied all regions of the state to determine the best location. "The main campus and UAMS' clinical programs around the state are close to saturated in terms of training opportunities," Kohler said, noting that third- and fourth-year medical students must have extensive supervised contact with large numbers of patients. "Studies showed that the only area with sufficient population to support the satellite campus right now is Northwest Arkansas."

Outside of the Little Rock Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), the largest concentration of hospitals and health care providers is in Northwest Arkansas. And the region is growing faster than other areas. By 2030, the Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers MSA is expected to swell by 67 percent, to more than 677,000.

"This is where all of the pieces happened to fit," said state Sen. Dave Bisbee of Rogers, who has worked with UAMS and others in the region from the start and helped UAMS secure \$1.9 million in seed money in 2007. "It is just so important to understand that

the satellite campus will help produce doctors for the whole state. This is Arkansas' medical school."

Building Support

Bisbee, who is term-limited, won't be in the General Assembly in early 2009 when UAMS seeks a critical ongoing appropriation to operate the new campus. But Gov. Mike Beebe has expressed support, contingent on local support and availability of state revenue, and several other legislators have come on board.

"There certainly is a need for more physicians in the state, and that need will only increase in the years ahead," said state Rep. Gene Shelby, M.D., who practices emergency medicine in Hot Springs and is working on a study of Arkansas' health care work force needs.

Cecile Bledsoe of Rogers, the senator-elect in Bisbee's district, noted that while the health of Arkansans is ultimately what's at stake, there also is an economic component for communities. "When newcomers and businesses consider locating in an area, they do evaluate the community's health care opportunities," she said.

Kohler and others have been working to raise philanthropic contributions for the renovations to the former Washington Regional building – and to demonstrate local support. Nearly \$2 million has been pledged, including a \$100,000 donation from the Northwest Arkansas Community Foundation, \$300,000 from the Walton Family Foundation on the recommendation of the nine Arvest Bank presidents in Arkansas, and \$500,000 from Care Foundation, Inc.

Washington County has leased the property to the state for \$1 a year, saving millions of dollars in lease or construction costs. The 330,000-square-foot main building will house classrooms, simulation labs, a library, administrative offices and the AHEC clinics. Videoconferencing systems will facilitate distance learning with the main campus.

Promoting Primary Care

Medical students at UAMS-Northwest won't just be in a new location. They'll be the first in Arkansas to experience clinical clerkships in a new way.

"We want to make sure all Arkansans have access to care, and that means producing graduates who want to work as first-contact, primary care physicians," said Richard P. Wheeler, M.D., the COM's executive associate dean for academic affairs.

Juniors at the satellite will complete the same clerkships as their classmates in Little Rock, but they won't rotate through traditional multi-week blocks devoted to individual disciplines. Instead, students will experience all of the facets of medicine on an ongoing basis. Following a "longitudinal" curriculum, they might work in a family medicine clinic one day, with a psychiatrist the next, and with a surgeon another day of the week, Wheeler said.

"The experience will be a little more like they would have as primary care physicians, whose patients and cases are different each day," added Kohler. "We think it will appeal to a lot of students."

Longitudinal curricula are being advocated by a national consortium of schools. The curriculum is a good fit for UAMS-Northwest, where most of the faculty serving as preceptors will be physicians in area clinics and hospitals. Participating physicians won't necessarily have to devote the multiple consecutive weeks of time that would be needed with block scheduling. ▶

