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Teaming Up

## UH's medical school partnership is 'a win-win' for all parties

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The University of Houston announced Nov. 16 its board of regents approved the establishment of a college of medicine, the latest move to bolster UH's national reputation. More significantly, UH's long-planned medical school aims to serve an unmet need in Houston's medical landscape.

On the surface, the medical school appears to be another player in a medical school sector full of renowned names, such as Baylor College of Medicine. However, UH argues its medical school — expected to admit its first students in 2020 — will help fill an unmet need of primary care doctors in Houston and southeast Texas.

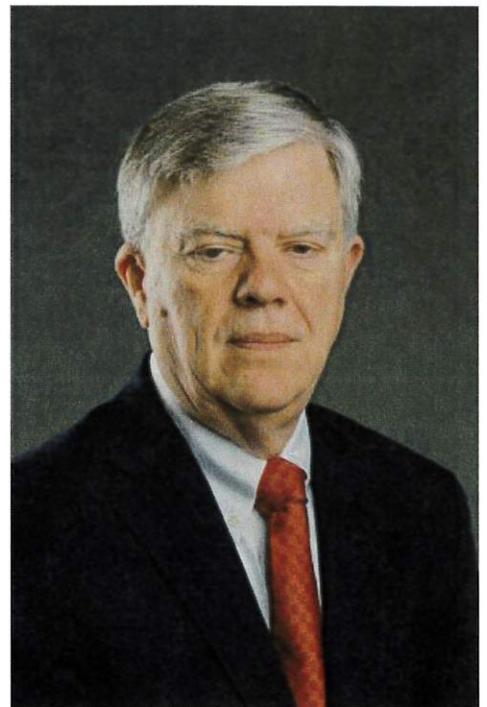
"This is not meant to be a direct competitor to the University of Texas, Baylor College of Medicine or M.D. Anderson; places that are offering first-rate training in specialty care," said Dr. Vivian Ho, director of the center for health and biosciences at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy. "This is a supplement to address a critical need in the Houston area."

The critical need is a major gap in health care for Houstonians, adds Dr. Stephen Klineberg, head of the Kinder Institute for Urban Research. As one of the most segregated cities by income, the Bayou City's poor are being left behind in a number of sectors, health care included, he added.

"Access to primary care physicians are gateways into the (health care) system," Klineberg said. "That's the critical access node and having a medical school dedicated to those physicians with a social conscience and sense of obligation to help the needy wherever they are, it's a very positive step for a city trying to reinvent itself in the 21st century."

UH hired Dr. Stephen Spann as the planning dean of the medical school in 2015. He said he is excited to craft a medical school from scratch.

"The next one to five years will be busy getting accreditation, developing a medical education, recruiting the faculty and the first class of medical students," Spann said. "There's a lot of work to be done."



COURTESY

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When fully enrolled, UH's medical school will have 480 students, and 130 faculty and support staff by 2027.

UH has also partnered with the Healthcare Corporation of America (NYSE: HCA) — now the largest health care system in Houston by bed count — to build out its residency and graduate programs. The expectation is to have 103 first-year resident positions to the Houston area by 2020, with a total of 309 by 2024, according to a UH press release.

The affiliation is an almost necessity for a medical school's success, and now a requirement of the most recent Texas legislature, which requires new medical schools to develop a specific number of first-year residency positions in the state. It's an effort to keep medical school students from receiving a Texas education and then flocking to other states to hone their craft and start their careers, Spann said.

"It's a win-win," Spann added. "HCA needed an academic affiliate, and we needed a hospital system."

UH and its chancellor Renu Khator have pushed the idea of a medical school for nearly a decade and laid groundwork for the school during that time. Those pieces include consolidating health care-related programs closer to the Texas Medical Center, raising hundreds of millions of dollars as part of a \$1 billion capital campaign program and initiating plans for new biomedical and health-care related buildings around campus.

"There are so many Houstonians that do not have access to health care," Khator said in a January interview. "They end up in emergency care rather than paying attention to preventive and primary care ... We will continue to explore how to fill that need or function."

The university cites statistics such as the fact that Texas ranks 47th out of 50 states in primary care doctors per person and that the city's physician population has not kept pace with its rapid growth. These figures, and the fact that the city's other medical schools lean more toward specialized care, are what make UH's medical school attractive, Ho said.

"The University of Houston, to its credit, is responding to (a critical problem)," Klineberg said. "It's something to be applauded across the board. It's a big challenge; it's expensive and doesn't have the prestige that other medical schools are seeking, but it recognizes a real need in this city."

Focusing a medical school around primary care presents a number of challenges. It may not have the same appeal as advanced specialty care for both students and educators. Even if they come in with ambitions to go on to primary care, medical school students tend to gravitate toward specialized focuses for a number of reasons, including higher pay after graduation. Students accumulate hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt during medical school, making the income of a specialist even more attractive. Professors think the same way, wanting to be on the cutting edge of both lucrative and highly recognized fields, such as oncology or neurosurgery.

However, other colleges around the country have implemented a similar model as UH and its ambitions can be successful if it remains true to its original plans, Ho said.

"The model does work if you have the faculty who know how to treat patients with chronic diseases in low-income areas," Ho said, adding that the impetus would be on the state legislature to keep the plans in check.

State funding is expected to handle around one-third of the medical school's total budget, with endowment funding and income from UH's intellectual property handling the rest, according to UH.

## **Medical schools in Texas**

Baylor College of Medicine

UT Southwestern Medical Center

UT Medical Branch at Galveston

McGovern Medical School (formerly the UT Health Science Center at Houston)

UT School of Medicine at San Antonio

UT Austin, Dell Medical School

UT Rio Grande Valley School of Medicine

Texas A&M HSC, College of Medicine

Texas Tech HSC School of Medicine

UNT HSC Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine

Texas Tech HSC Paul L. Foster School of Medicine at El Paso

University of the Incarnate Word School of Osteopathic Medicine

\*University of Houston medical school (first students expected in 2020)

\*University of North Texas Health Science Center and Texas Christian University (first students expected in 2019)

\*Sam Houston State University College of Osteopathic Medicine (first students expected in 2020)

\*proposed

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## **By the numbers**

### **\$120 million**

The estimated cost of the 10-year startup phase for University of Houston's proposed medical school.

### **\$33.3 million**

The estimated annual operating expenses of UH's medical school, according to Pittsburgh-based Tripp Umbach.