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Residents at Kootenai Medical Center

Program will help attract, retain family medicine physicians

COEUR d'ALENE -- Kootenai Medical Center has begun the first step of a process that should result in medical residents making rounds at the Coeur d'Alene hospital by 2012. The new program will help attract and retain new family medicine physicians to the area, say KMC officials.

"Family medicine physicians are in short supply nationally and locally," said Joe Morris, CEO of Kootenai Health. "Here in Kootenai County, our population is growing, models of care are changing, and many of our existing family medicine physicians are looking toward retirement.

"Statistically we know that most physicians practice within 50 miles of where they complete their residency. Starting a residency program is consistent with Kootenai's commitment to help attract and retain quality care providers to our community."

Richard McLandress has been a family medicine physician in the Coeur d'Alene area since the 1970s.

"This project is a fantastic opportunity for our community. We will be part of one of the strongest family medicine residency programs in the country," McLandress said. "Now staffed by the entire spectrum of primary care specialists and medical/surgical subspecialists, Kootenai Medical Center will be a superb teaching hospital, becoming the regional center for family physician graduate medical education."

Kootenai will be working with Family Medicine Residency of Idaho, a nonprofit organization that is a tract of the University of Washington Family Medicine Residency Network, which has been ranked as the top program in the nation for many years. Family Residency of Idaho offers one of only two residency programs in the state.

Ted Epperly, M.D., CEO and program director of Family Medicine Residency of Idaho outlined the timeframe for the residency program. Pending Kootenai's certification later this year, the group will begin accepting and interviewing applicants specifically for Coeur d'Alene.

"Family Medicine Residency of Idaho is known as an excellent program," Epperly said. "We routinely attract some of the top medical students in the country for our programs in Idaho. I'm sure Coeur d'Alene will be an area many of them will find very appealing."

Applicants will be interviewed by Coeur d'Alene-area physicians who have already pledged their support for the residency program at Kootenai. Local interviews are designed to help ensure a good match between the program and participants.

By 2011, the top two applicants will begin the three-year residency program. Their first year of residency will be served in Boise. Years two and three, 2012 and 2013, will be at Kootenai Medical Center.

"In 2012 we will also accept two more applicants into the program, meaning that in 2013 Kootenai will have two residents in their third year and two residents in their second year," Epperly said. "We will continue recruiting for the program so every year Kootenai can look forward to new second-year residents."

Once the program is established, the number of new applicants accepted each year may be increased from two to four.

"The medical community in North Idaho wants to see a program like this in Coeur d'Alene," Morris said. "Each of them were residents once themselves, so they know what it takes to have a good program. We already have the services, equipment and specialists. We're committed to developing a program that will help our residents become physicians we'd trust with our own care."