

Idaho medical school to open next year

Founding dean says for-profit facility will help reduce doctor shortage

MERIDIAN, Idaho – Idaho’s first medical school is inching closer to its August 2018 finish line by hiring critical faculty members, developing programs, and constructing facilities. The school is expected to help with Idaho’s physician shortage.

Construction of the privately funded, for-profit Idaho College of Osteopathic Medicine (ICOM) is ahead of schedule and set to be finished in the spring, according to KTVB-TV. The proposed medical school currently has pre-accreditation status and is expected to be officially accredited before the end of the year, which means it can start recruiting 150 students to fill its first graduating class.

“Idaho is the most populous state without a medical school of its own and we rank 50th in terms of primary care physicians per capita,” ICOM founding dean Dr. Robert Hasty told KTVB.

A medical school of Idaho’s own will ensure a supply of physicians to Idahoans and rural areas, helping the physician shortage and allowing medical students to practice in their home state, he said.

“Idahoans have very limited options here and frequently have to leave the state and they go off somewhere else in the U.S. or even off somewhere else in the world to try to become a physician. And many times they don’t come back,” Hasty added.

The three determinants of where a doctor will practice are where they’re from, where they attended medical school and where they completed their residency program. Idaho College of Osteopathic Medicine has a mission to train physicians to serve and care for people who live in the Gem State, surrounding states in the region, and beyond. Admissions priority will be given to Idahoans and students from Montana, North and South Dakota and Wyoming.

“To get into medical school if you’re an Idahoan or anyone in the region is incredibly competitive. And with our ability to have the preference for admissions, No. 1, we’ll give those preferences for Idahoans. The demand to become a physician is off the charts. We’re going to easily fill the first class once we get the ability to start recruiting students. This is going to be a game changer for the region,” Hasty said.

The difference between an osteopathic doctor, a DO, and a doctor of medicine, an MD, is that DOs have a more holistic view of medicine and emphasize a “whole person” approach to reach a diagnosis and provide treatment, rather than treating the symptoms alone. They also focus on the musculoskeletal system.

“We had the opportunity to create an MD school or a DO school for the needs of the areas. Because DOs, or doctors of osteopathic medicine, are more likely to practice in primary care and rural areas – which are so needed for Idaho and for the region – that’s the reason we decided for an osteopathic medicine school,” Hasty told KTVB.

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The \$34 million building is 94,000 square feet and will have about 110 work spaces.

“Thinking of the needs of the physician of the future – so everything from the design of the building to curriculum and to the faculty and how they all interplay together. And we’ve been thoughtful: Everything from size of each classroom to the lecture halls to the flow of students and the student wellness. That’s been critical to the development of ICOM,” Hasty said.

The school will offer spaces ranging from group study rooms and student lounges to lecture halls and multipurpose classrooms, examination offices, a clinical skills lab and simulation labs with mannequins and actual people, or “standardized patients.”

There are even a spiritual room and a breastfeeding room.

ICOM’s facilities, programs and coursework are focused on hands-on practice to prepare future osteopathic physicians.

But some concerns have been raised over what happens after the students’ four years, when they train under a physician in a residency program.

“The challenge – because Idaho has never had a medical school of its own – we’ve fallen way behind in terms of residency programs. We currently rank 49th in terms of residency positions per capita,” Hasty said.

ICOM has dozens of partnerships and affiliations with medical centers and health care organizations in the region for the first graduating class to start clinical rotations in 2020. The college budgeted \$5 million over its first 10 years to help get more local residency programs off the ground – programs that will then be largely funded by the government, like all residency programs.

“We’re also very confident that our contributions, our partnerships will help foster an increase in the growth and development of residency programs for the state and the region,” Hasty said.

ICOM is on Idaho State University’s Meridian Health Science Center campus and the schools are affiliated. They are planning to share facilities and collaborate in research.

“We also are going to be using their anatomy spaces. So we’ve actually licensed their anatomy spaces for 40 years. In addition, some of the research opportunities are really huge. With our faculty and the expertise we have with research, as well as some of their experience and some of their research facilities, it’s really going to be a worldclass collaborative partnership for research,” Hasty said. “It’s a private-public partnership. And with this, we’re not going to take any taxpayer dollars. But we are going to have this mutually beneficial relationship.” The Idaho College of Osteopathic Medicine will have 75 full-time positions by the time it opens its doors in August 2018 and in 2022, when the first class graduates, the college will employ 104 full-time faculty and staff in addition to hundreds of clinical and adjunct faculty.

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