

School Daze

There has been controversy and a cloud of misinformation obscuring the realities of a new medical school for Arizona to be located here in Maricopa County. After a recent meeting with Dr. Keith Joiner, Dean of the College of Medicine at the University of Arizona, a clear picture of the realities of this project can now be displayed, not the political portrait painted by the press and by the Governor's office.

Dr. Joiner became dean in March 2004. His undergraduate degree was obtained at the University of Chicago and his medical degree was earned at the University of Colorado. Dr. Joiner's specialty is infectious disease and he is the author of many scholarly papers. We were privileged to have him as our guest at the June medical society board meeting. His presentation addressed not only the present design for a medical campus in Phoenix but he also spoke to the realities of the physician manpower needs of our state that subsequently have been eloquently detailed in the *Arizona Physician Workforce Study*.

The medical campus to be located in Phoenix will be directed at the core medical curriculum initially. The current outline calls for approximately twenty-plus students in the first class. As proposed, the school will be located in downtown Phoenix near the T-Gen complex. Ultimately the physical plant may grow to rival the total square footage of the Tucson campus. There will eventually be a complete educational program on the phoenix campus that will embrace not only the basic sciences but clinical education as well. The timeline for this could be eight to ten years. The program presented by Dr. Joiner is well designed and deserves our support. There is no doubt that an allopathic medical school campus is a necessary and welcome addition to our community. We also learned that the accreditation process for allopathic medical schools is far more stringent than for the private osteopathic schools present and planned for our community hence the protracted timeline for implementation.

The governor's office and our friends at *The Arizona Republic* would point to the new school as a cure for the increasing physician shortage, "long waits in the emergency room and doctors' offices." As the manpower study points out however, there is a tremendous gap between the national ratio of physicians to population and that in evidence here in Arizona. The new medical campus has been a political football and a smoke screen to hide this glaring, dangerous, and ever present dilemma. There is no doubt that the new medical campus will some day help to add clinicians to care for our population but even Dr. Joiner denies that this a panacea for the lack of medical care both for the present and for the foreseeable future. I think Dean Joiner understands as we do there is a cancer invading the practice of medicine in this community.

Like many malignancies it will necessary to use multiple modalities to bring forth a cure. Medical education is only one of these. While the manpower study does not support the notion that physicians are leaving our state it does point to a significant aging of the physician population and ultimately this leads to a reduction of workload and efficiency as in any profession. While Arizona physicians earn incomes that are not below average we don't know what if any additional work is required to maintain those incomes in our

managed care environment. While our liability insurance rates are not the highest in the country the rate of recent increase sends an alarming signal that this will not always be the case. The now well-established fact remains; the citizens of Arizona have far less access to care than the national average. Twenty or one hundred and twenty new medical students will not reverse the course of this disease. The effect of a new medical education campus will perhaps suppress the problem in the future but only after it has been brought under control!

Our governor, our elected representatives, the press, and our neighbors need to be engaged in discussion and an all-out assault on the physician manpower problem. The doctors of our community must be consulted in order to accurately diagnose and treat this problem. Just building the medical school will not suffice. I applaud Drs. Rimsza, Grossman, Johnson and, Garcy for their landmark efforts to expose these issues and anxiously anticipate part two of their research that will surely shed light on the questions raised thus far. This is not an issue that affects doctors. After all, aren't we all patients?

See you next month,

Marc J. Rosen, M.D.
President