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Fourth-year University of Illinois College of Medicine student Amy Obendorf examines Rachel Baddorf at the UIC Primary Care Clinic in Mount Morris Tuesday.

Med school gets first dollars for expansion

By ELIZABETH NENDICK
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ROCKFORD — Rockford's medical college is getting \$1.5 million from Congress to expand a program that trains doctors and other health-care professionals for practice in underserved rural communities.

Officials gathered Tuesday at the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford to announce the funding, which Congress passed last week in the 2003 spending bill.

The money represents the first significant funding for a \$24 million expansion of the college's program in rural health education. The college plans to erect a four-story, 72,000-square-foot building on the Parkview Avenue campus.

"This is the leading school of medicine in the country for getting people prepared to work in rural medical education," said U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo, R-Egan, who helped secure the funding. "We have a real opportunity to get on the map."

No construction date has been set, and the addition is expected to open in five to seven years. The college is planning a fund-raising campaign for the rest of the money.

"This is a first step," said the college's dean, Bernard Salafsky. "Dollars will lead to other dol-



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lars. There will be multiple avenues of support."

CLARCOR emeritus chairman Larry Gloyd and The Alford Group of Evanston are leading a \$30,000 study to determine how much money can be raised through a community campaign.

The building project, first announced in August 2001, represents the medical college's biggest expansion since it erected a six-story building in 1975, shortly after opening. The architect is Larson and Darby of Rockford.

The building expansion is part of the college's vision to create a national model for the education of health professionals in rural areas. The college's rural education program began train-

ing doctors in 1993, then added classes for nursing, public health and pharmaceutical studies in 2000.

The program might add specialties such as dentistry, physical therapy, social work and nutrition in coming years.

Illinois ranks No. 8 in the country for shortages of health professional. About 75 percent of the state's rural counties are considered medically underserved.

By creating the National Center for Rural Health Professions, college officials want Rockford to be a leader for the country's 12 other rural health programs, initiating research and analyzing public policy related to health care in rural areas.

"This center has the potential to set itself up as a model for training rural health professionals, to bring people from around the world and show them how this is done," Salafsky said.

Rockford's rural medical program has a broader range of specialties than similar colleges, said Michael Glasser, assistant dean for rural health professions. The program has graduated 39 students. Of those with jobs, 77 percent work in rural communities — a greater share than those from other U.S. medical schools.

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