

Rockford plans rural medical education program

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ROCKFORD, Ill. — The University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford plans to construct a National Center for Rural Health Professionals to add its current Rural Medical Education Program.

"This is a national center for rural health professionals," said Bernard Salafsky, regional dean for the U of I College of Medicine at Rockford.

"As short as we are in counties across Illinois for physicians, we are equally if not more

so short of other health professionals — nurses, pharmacists, social workers and public health care workers."

The proposed \$24 million center will feature a 72,000-square-foot building addition to the campus in Rockford.

The facility will house classrooms, laboratories and offices for the National Center for Rural Health Professions, the Office of Health Systems Research and the Crawford Medical Library of the University of Illinois-Chicago's Library of Health Sciences.

"In Illinois, we have 95 counties with departments of public health and usually an administrator has a masters of public health degree," Salafsky explained. "But only eight counties in Illinois have an administrator with this degree."

Shortages of health care workers and professionals are not only a problem in Illinois.

"This is a U.S. problem," the regional dean stressed.

The RMED program was started in 1993 to recruit medical students from Illinois to locate in rural Illinois as primary care physicians once they have completed their residency training.

"This project can dramatically enhance rural health care delivery, not only here but across the nation," said James Stukel, president of the U of I.

"The National Center for Rural Health Care is a one of a kind program that will place U of I and the state of Illinois center stage nationally for rural medical health care education and it will actively improve access to health care in underserved rural areas in Illinois."

Darryl Vandervort, president and chief executive officer of KSB Hospital, Dixon, Ill., highlighted the importance of establishing healthy communities throughout Illinois.

"In creating healthy communities, our citizens must be given proper access to health care and in doing so, we must recognize the importance of education," he said.

The plan to construct a national center has been an ongoing project for the past three years.

"This will be a partnership between federal, state and local government along with the U of I," the university president said.

U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo, R-Ill., helped to secure \$1.9 million toward the project.

"A private fund-raising campaign is on going now," Stukel reported. "And we hope Gov. Blagojevich will include this project in his Regional Economic Development Initiative."

The fund-raising effort should not only be focused on

Rockford, Salafsky stated.

"I think the agri-businesses in Illinois, who serve the communities we intend to serve, are natural donors for our program," he added.

"The College of Medicine at Rockford has a wonderful record of recruiting medical students from rural Illinois to practice primary care in rural Illinois," Stukel said. "No other school in the country has a program like this."

"I'm excited to be part of this university and part of this program," said Martin Lipsky, incoming regional dean, University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford.

For more information about the Center for Rural Health Professionals at the University of Illinois College of Medicine in Rockford, visit <http://rhp.rockford.uic.edu/rhp> on the Internet.