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FAU, hospitals partner on residency program

Florida Atlantic University's medical school and five area hospitals agreed Wednesday to launch a residency program, a move that could ease the county's shortage of doctors.

The partnership includes FAU, Boca Raton Regional Hospital, Bethesda Medical Center in Boynton Beach, St. Mary's Medical Center in West Palm Beach, Delray Medical Center and West Boca Medical Center.

"This is huge," FAU President Mary Jane Saunders said. "The addition of 200 to 300 residencies is really an enormous step forward for the quality of care for all of the residents of Palm Beach County."

FAU's medical school opened in August with its first class of 64 students. After medical school, doctors must complete residencies that last three to seven years.

Palm Beach County hospitals have only a small number of residencies, which doctors say has contributed to the area's shortage of doctors. Most doctors stay in the areas where they complete their residencies.

"Medical schools are great, but doctors have to go someplace else for their training," said Dr. Lawrence Gorfine, former president of the Palm Beach Medical Society. "It's a good start."

It's unclear how much the program will cost, FAU officials said. Residencies are paid for by Medicare and hospitals where residents work.

The residency program is expected to begin taking doctors-in-training in two years.

The FAU program still must be approved by the Accreditation Council on Graduate Medical Education, but Dr. Michael Dennis, chairman of the board of FAU's medical school, expects few obstacles. He hopes the residency program will attract younger doctors to a county where nearly 40 percent of physicians are over 55.

"Florida has been an exporter of graduates from medical schools for years," Dennis said. "We need to correct that situation. "

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