

More medical school grads means more competition for clerkships

August 9, 2015 | Jay Greene

The 75 percent increase in medical school graduates in Michigan the past eight years is causing some problems in finding clinical clerkship training positions for students.

Clerkships are training experiences for students during their third and fourth years of medical school and are required under medical school accreditation rules. Schools pay a wide range of monthly fees and sometimes make other payments or donations to hospitals, outpatient centers, nursing homes and other post-acute care settings to create the slots.

Prices have been driven up in recent years in part because of general supply and demand and also by Caribbean medical schools, which have been willing to pay more to obtain the slots for their students.

In some cases, prices for the student clerkships have spiked to as much as \$2,000 per student per month, said George Kikano, M.D., dean of Central Michigan University School of Medicine in Mt. Pleasant.

"Caribbean schools are for-profit and their accreditation requirements are different," said Kikano, noting they have deeper pockets for clerkships than Michigan schools.

William Strampel, D.O., dean of Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine in East Lansing, said Caribbean schools are increasing costs for all medical schools in the state and cited payments of \$500-\$1,000 a month from Ross University School of Medicine in Dominica and American University of the Caribbean in Sint Maarten.

A spokesman for American University declined to give specifics about what the school pays, but said it has had a 10-year relationship with St. John Providence.

"We have covered the expenses required to build their medical education infrastructure," said Chris Railey, the school's senior director of communications. "We also made a gift to support development of a simulation center and support their research program."

Ross University has a clerkship arrangement with St. Joseph Mercy Oakland in Pontiac. Officials at St. Joseph confirmed they train Ross University and other medical school students. Officials for Ross University were unavailable for comment.

Robert Folberg, M.D., dean of Oakland University-William Beaumont School of Medicine in Rochester Hills, said confidential agreements with Beaumont Health prevent him from disclosing how much the medical school pays for its student clerkships.

"We are concerned about it, and it is driving up the price in Michigan," Folberg said. "It is not just in Michigan. Deans in New York are apoplectic about it. They are capping enrollment because of the costs."

Besides increasing numbers of medical students and clerkship prices, medical schools are competing for training positions with allied practitioners that include nurse practitioners, physician assistants and dentists.

Another challenge for schools is new accreditation rules that require first and second year students to also gain clinical field training.

Jack Sobel: Fears that opportunities may be shrinking.

Jack Sobel, M.D., dean of the medical school at Wayne State University, is concerned clerkship opportunities at hospitals may be shrinking because of increasing medical school enrollment and recent hospital mergers.

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Of Wayne's 580 student clerkships, one-third go to Henry Ford Health System, one-third go to Detroit Medical Center and the rest go to Oakwood Healthcare, St. John Hospital and Medical Center and the John D. Dingell VA Medical Center in Detroit.

"We have students at Oakwood and can't be certain we will continue to have students there," said Sobel, noting that Oakwood has merged into the new eight-hospital Beaumont Health.

But Folberg said Beaumont has made it clear to him that it will not interfere with any medical school affiliation, including the one at Wayne State.

Last month, **Michigan State University College of Human Medicine** struck a five-year deal with Providence Hospital in Southfield to establish MSU's seventh community campus, the first in Southeast Michigan.

Over the next several years, Providence will host a total of 60 of MSU's third and fourth year students. MSU's medical school has a 200 student enrollment, up from 156 in 2007, said **Aron Sousa, M.D.**, senior associate dean for academics at MSU.

The move to Detroit was also partially the result of MSU losing hospital clerkships in Saginaw and Kalamazoo to other medical schools, said several sources. MSU also places students at hospitals in Flint, Lansing, Grand Rapids, Traverse City, Marquette and Midland.

Robert Flora, M.D., director of medical education at Providence Hospital, said the Southfield Catholic hospital trains 34 medical students, including 24 medical students from American University and 10 students from Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine.