UMMC, COMMUNITY COLLEGES JOIN FORCES TO BOOST BACCALAUREATE DEGREES

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JACKSON, Miss. – The University of Mississippi Medical Center is partnering with Mississippi's 15 community and junior colleges in a statewide effort aimed at increasing the number of health-care practitioners with baccalaureate degrees.

Across the state, students are preparing for careers in allied health fields at the associate degree level. UMMC's 2+U program is designed to identify and recruit highly qualified students early so that upon graduation they can enter the work force and simultaneously enroll in one of five online baccalaureate programs in UMMC's School of Health Related Professions (SHRP). As a result, those graduates have the opportunity to further their educations and advance their degrees while earning incomes in their home communities.

Dr. James Keeton, vice chancellor for health affairs, said the goal is to reach these medical professionals where they live and work and thereby strengthen the state as a whole.

"Students enrolled in the 2+U program will be health-care professionals helping to provide better health care in their home communities while, at the same time, earning a good income which contributes to both the local and statewide economies," he said.

Led by 2+U director Dr. Javis Knott, the programs will include five online degrees: Clinical Laboratory Sciences, Dental Hygiene, Health Informatics and Information Management, Health Sciences, and Radiologic Sciences.

Students are required to have earned an associate degree in a health-care discipline and passed an appropriate licensure, registration or certification exam. Collectively, the colleges offer a wide range of associate allied health-degree programs that qualify for 2+U, such as dental hygiene technology, health information technology, physical therapy assistant and diagnostic medical sonography. Some qualifying programs don't have a corresponding baccalaureate program at UMMC but instead will lead to a degree in Health Sciences. For instance, although SHRP does not offer a respiratory therapy program, a respiratory therapist can still earn a bachelor's degree in Health Sciences online, explained Dr. Ben Mitchell, dean of the School of Health Related Professions.

The partnership will be recognized by formal agreements signed by Keeton and each college president.

“The 2+U Program at the University of Mississippi Medical Center is a wonderful example of alignment between Mississippi public universities and community colleges,” said Dr. Hank M. Bounds, commissioner of higher education. “By working together and utilizing technology, UMMC and the community colleges have created a program that will help students achieve their goals and provide much-needed health-care professionals in communities across the state.”

By teaming up with institutions as nearby as Hinds Community College and as far-flung as Itawamba Community College and Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, UMMC
will be able to reach students in all corners of the state. Mitchell said the partnership promises a variety of benefits for Mississippi. In addition to providing a higher educational level and improving health care, the collaboration will lead to more efficient use of higher education funds by maximizing resources and positively impacting the economy by enabling students to work while completing their studies.

“In this era of non-traditional students and innovative modes of instructional delivery, this is a logical step forward in improving the quality of life for Mississippians by enabling advanced educational opportunities, improving health care delivery and enhancing economic opportunities,” Mitchell said.

Dr. Eric Clark, executive director of the Mississippi State Board of Community and Junior Colleges, said he and his colleagues are excited about the program.

“2+U will offer online junior and senior medical-related classes to community college graduates,” he said. “By doing so, it will allow those people to live and work at home while they earn a bachelor’s degree and provide trained medical professionals to serve in rural communities across Mississippi.”

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05/18/2011

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The University of Mississippi Medical Center, located in Jackson, is the state's only academic medical center. University of Mississippi Health Care represents the clinical programs of the Medical Center and includes University Hospitals and Health System and University Physicians, the faculty group practice. UMMC encompasses five health science schools, including medicine, nursing, health related professions, dentistry and graduate studies, as well as the site where University of Mississippi pharmacy students do their clinical training. The Medical Center's threefold mission is to educate tomorrow's health-care professionals, conduct innovative research to improve human health, and to provide the highest quality care available to the state's citizens. A major goal of the Medical Center is the improvement of the health of Mississippians and the elimination of health disparities. For more information, contact the Division of Public Affairs at 601-984-1100 or visit us on the Web at http://info.umc.edu/.