

Shortage of student internships means Texas is losing doctors

☛ The spotlight is on Fort Worth's accomplishments and needs during National Osteopathic Medicine Week.

By James Czewski
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When I graduated from the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine in 1977 as a member of its fourth graduating class, I was thrilled to hear of my acceptance into a post-graduate medical training (Graduate Medical Education) program right here in Fort Worth.

After completing that internship, I accepted an attractive offer to open a family medical practice in another city. But two years later, after building a successful practice, I found myself longing to return to Fort Worth.

I wanted to practice in the community where I had completed my GME, working side-by-side with various specialists for an extended period during my training.

I believe most doctors feel comfortable in the environment where we've been trained, because we have grown to respect and genuinely like each other, based on our years of working together.

I bit the bullet, packed up and returned to an underserved area in north Fort Worth to join an active family medicine practice where I could serve as the "family doc," treating everyone from the very young to the very old.

With the celebration of National Osteopathic

Medicine Week April 13-19, I reflect with great pride on the strong heritage of my profession.

The very culture of osteopathic medicine is intriguing in that it melds more than a century of embracing the concept of treating "the whole person" with all the modern technological advances in surgery and diagnostic wonders in medicine today.

By encouraging our patients to develop healthy lifestyles, we promote wellness, which in turn, helps the body to "self-heal." Most DOs choose to become primary care physicians, though many of our DO colleagues prefer the specialty and sub-specialty areas in medicine.

I also take pride in the fact that "my" medical school, now associated with the University of North Texas Health Science Center, is consistently ranked among the top schools in the nation for primary care — and as the nation's top osteopathic medical school.

The greatest challenge to healthcare today is the critical shortage of doctors in Texas and across the U.S.

Although Fort Worth has a premier medical school and is turning out top-notch graduates, the real problem is the lack of post-graduate medical training positions.

Upon graduating from a medical school, "new" doctors must complete a residency (GME) program before they can be licensed to practice, and they often end up going else-

where.

This year in Texas, there are already 28 more medical graduates than existing residency positions, and this shortage is estimated to be 225 next year.

The number of GME slots in the Fort Worth area is dismal for a city our size, and we should demand that something be done about it in order to continue to provide excellent healthcare to our residents.

Studies show that 45 percent of graduates who leave our state to receive their GME training will not return to Texas to practice, choosing to locate permanently where they have done their residencies.

When interviewed, 38 percent of those residents say they would have stayed in Texas if GME training had been available.

It costs Texas taxpayers more than \$168,000 per student for four years of medical education. Extrapolating the numbers, based on 225 graduates, it is a financial loss of more than \$6.5 million a year when these students are forced to leave the state for GME.

Even more catastrophic is the loss of much-needed physicians.

We must assure the graduates of our medical schools that there will be GME training slots right here in Texas.

We must keep our Texas-educated doctors in Texas!

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Opinion

From Fort Hood, a lesson in forgiveness

A wounded soldier becomes friends with the shooter's family

When President Barack Obama and the first lady made a return visit to Fort Hood last week, they paused in front of the kind of memorials we have become accustomed to seeing since the start of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

But this time the moving symbols — three pairs of boots, three rifles topped with three helmets, alongside photographs of three proud servicemen — did not represent soldiers killed in war. They had been slain by one of their own when Specialist Ivan A. Lopez went on an eight-minute shooting spree, wounding 16 others before killing himself.

The president, and the nation as a whole, couldn't help but recall that five years earlier another soldier, Specialist Hasan,



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safe."

Although there were only three sets of memorials in front of the podium where Obama spoke, he made a point to include the shooter in his remarks.

"Today four American soldiers are gone; four American families are devastated," he said.

Sometimes we forget that the families of assailants suffer along with the families of victims.

I saw this back during the gang wars in the 1980s when, on more than one occasion, I found myself in the presence of two mothers crying: one because her son was dead, the other because her son had killed



Memorials of boots, rifles and helmets honor three who died — Danny Ferguson, Carlos Lazaney-Rodriguez and Timothy Owens. The Associated Press/Carolyn Kaster

so severely wounded that he was nicknamed "No. 14" because many didn't think he would survive the four severe bullet wounds, including one to the head that resulted in 20 percent of his brain being removed, correspondent Doualy Xaykaothao reported.

Now living with his wife in Houston, Minn., Zeigler also said

members of Hasan's family, the children are just as much victims in this," she told Xaykaothao.

"What I learned about them is that they're phenomenal people who have a beautiful faith. And they're good family members. They love one another, they care about the victims, and they've done kind things for the victims, as included."

Zeigler also said

I was moved by the compassion expressed by this young couple who now have a 1-year-old son who came along after Zeigler thought he wouldn't be able to have children.

We certainly shouldn't

The president took note of that in his speech last week, saying, "I'm determined we will continue to step up our efforts to reach our troops and veterans who are hurting, to deliver to them the care that they need and to make sure we never stigmatize those that have the courage to seek help."

Unless action follows those words, we can expect