

# Medical school commences in Flagstaff

By SEAN CLENDANIEL

North Country HealthCare has joined forces with the A.T. Still University School of Osteopathic Medicine to educate tomorrow's community-minded physicians. The new medical school based in Mesa is using an innovative curriculum to train primary care physicians, especially those who wish to remain in medically-underserved communities. Beginning in September 2008, North Country HealthCare will host ten of A.T. Still's medical students in Flagstaff during their second, third, and fourth years of medical training.

The physician shortage facing our nation and northern Arizona is a serious issue. Overall, Arizona ranks 49th in per capita health services employment, according to the Health Resources and Services Administration. The problem is even more severe in the rural communities throughout northern Arizona. Fewer and fewer medical schools and residency programs are graduating the "primary care physicians" who make up the front lines of the family medicine workforce.

Evidence shows that health professionals are more likely

to practice in the communities where they were trained, but northern Arizona currently has little in the way of health professions training. By bringing medical students to Flagstaff, North Country will get them connected with the community and northern Arizona's healthcare systems. With local knowledge and connections gained as students, these future physicians will be better prepared to serve our community. Northern Arizona will have a chance to "grow its own health professionals."

A.T. Still University's students will spend their first year of medical school at the campus in Mesa, and then students will be placed in communities across America to complete their training over

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the next three years. On Sept. 3, the first group of 10 second-year medical students arrived at North Country HealthCare, which will serve as a "Community Campus" for the students. Additional classes of students will arrive in subsequent years, meaning that within three years there will be 30 medical students based in Flagstaff.

A.T. Still University's "North Country Campus" will be located at a new Learning Center with two distance learning classrooms, faculty offices, a computer lab, and Telehealth equipment. The Learning Center will also house the staff of Northern Arizona Area Health Education Center, a program at North Country HealthCare which has a 20-year track record of health profes-

sions education. At the Learning Center NAHEC will host additional health professions training, health career activities for youth, continuing education programs for professionals, and community events such as health and wellness education.

On Oct. 1 from 11 a.m. to noon North Country HealthCare will have an open house at the new Learning Center and the community will have an opportunity to meet Flagstaff's new medical students. A short program will take place, with tours of the facility after the program for anyone interested. For more information, call Sean Clendaniel at 779-7245.

Sean Clendaniel is the Director of the Northern Arizona Area Health Education Center and Director of Training and Education at North Country HealthCare.