

A game-changer

SSCH part of consortium that will bring eight new family medicine residents to the Mississippi Delta

Healthcare in Sunflower County is about to change drastically, thanks to an influx of new doctors who will be training in Indianola as part of a new family medicine residency program based out of Delta Regional Medical Center in Greenville.

The Mississippi Delta Family Medicine Residency Program, a new community-based project sponsored by the Mississippi Medical Education & Research Consortium (MSMERC), received accreditation at the end of January and will be hosting its first eight family medicine residents this summer, according to Program Director Dr. Evelyn Walker.

Walker, a native of Drew and a veteran physician in the Jackson area, has been working to help establish a family medicine residency in the Delta for several years.

“If there are more physicians to provide care to the citizens in these rural areas, we can improve health outcomes, which is lower in the rural areas than in the urban areas of the state,” Walker told The E-T in a recent interview.

The program was born out of the Mississippi Legislature in 2012 when money was appropriated to start the Office of Mississippi Physician Workforce.

“The whole aim is to increase to increase the

physician workforce across the state, especially in rural areas of Mississippi,” Walker said. “We have a low population to physician ratio. Our number of physicians we have to take care of the population is low.”

Walker said that data show that more than 50% of doctors end up practicing where they do their residencies, a statistic that was important when trying to place the program in an area of the state that is in

In late January, the consortium got the news the program had been accredited.

The Mississippi Delta Family Medicine Residency Program will accept eight new residents per year, starting in July. That means that in three years, the Delta will have 24 family medicine residents training between Delta Regional Medical Center and what will become its new continuity clinic and South Sunflower County

especially if the resident is going to work in rural Mississippi, we think it will be a plus to have them trained.”

There are currently seven full-time physicians at South Sunflower.

“We’ve got a great group of physicians here at South Sunflower, and they will provide that training to our residents,” Walker said. “They will help with the clinics and help supervise the residents there. Our residents will have a large presence at South Sunflower here as well.”

Walker said that plans are underway and much of the funding is available to renovate the lower level of the shuttered Kings Daughter’s Hospital in Greenville into

the beforementioned continuity clinic, as part of a multimillion dollar project.

She said work on that should begin in the next few months, and it should be ready when the second class of residents enter the program next summer.

“We’ll start with a temporary clinic and hopefully by first of next year have a completed first phase to accommodate the next year of residents,” she said.

Walker said that having two dozen doctors in the area in three years will not only boost healthcare resources for Delta patients, but it will also be a boon for the local economies.

Dr. Evelyn Walker

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need of full-time physicians.

Walker said Office of Mississippi Physician Workforce Director Dr. John Mitchell has been working to establish the Delta program for several years as well.

The application called for a three-year residency program with eight residents per year.

The consortium finally got their site visit in late October 2019 from the Accrediting Council of Graduate Medical Education.

Five community doctors were interviewed as part of the site visit.

“We felt really good after the site visit,” Walker said.

Hospital in Indianola.

The original plan was to include more hospitals in the consortium, Walker said, but it eventually was narrowed to DRMC and SSCH.

South Sunflower was chosen, because it will be able to offer OBGYN training to the residents, training Walker says many family medicine residents don’t receive.

“Most family physicians in Mississippi are not trained to...deliver babies,” Walker said. “We have a really unique opportunity here at South Sunflower in that the family physicians here deliver babies. And we want our residents to be trained to deliver babies,