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 Indiana 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 (MSEMERC), 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, we can improve life expectancy, which is lower in the rural areas than in the urban areas of the state,” Walker said 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 need of full-time physicians.

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.

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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