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NYITCOM at A-State

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Brings New Medical
Education to Arkansas



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A well-known New York medical school now boasts an Arkansas address.

On the morning of Aug. 8, 2016, students began inaugural classes at the New York Institute of Technology College of Osteopathic Medicine at Arkansas State University. A few days prior, officials had welcomed the students in with the pomp and ceremony that we would expect from a medical school – white coats and all.

NYITCOM at A-State is accredited by the Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation and is the state's first functioning osteopathic medical school.* It joins the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences as one of the state's two operating medical schools.

Background

Adding a professional school, medical in particular, had been on Arkansas State's radar since 2009, according to Arkansas State Vice Chancellor for University Advancement Jason Penry, PhD. Initially, the idea did not get far, despite strong interest. "The consensus was that we didn't have the money for it," said Dr. Penry, "but when Chancellor Hudson came to A-State in 2012, the topic resurfaced."

With Dr. Penry on point, a planning committee began to look into options for adding a medical school. The committee also included A-State Chancellor Dr. Tim Hudson, Jonesboro Regional Chamber of Commerce CEO Mark Young, St. Bernards Healthcare CEO Chris Barber, NEA Baptist Memorial Hospital CEO Brad Parsons, Former CEO

Jason Penry, PhD

of NEA Baptist Clinic Darrell King, Jonesboro Mayor Harold Perrin, and NYITCOM Associate Dean of Clinical Affairs Shane Speights, DO (during his time on the committee, Dr. Speights was vice president of Medical Affairs at St. Bernards Medical Center).

Upon researching the concept, the group noticed an emerging trend of public-private partnerships. They found the approach appealing for its mutually beneficial nature. Such an arrangement brings to the table a school with a proven history and established accreditation, according to Dr. Penry, and it solves the funding issue. "Once we found that we could significantly decrease the entry barriers to get a medical school started, we were very excited," he said.

When A-State officials began looking at possible partnering institutions, the New York Institute of Technology kept coming up. The Institute houses the nation's largest on-site medical school; it features roughly 300 students per class, a 30-year history, and prominent personnel. "We knew about NYIT's Dr. Barbara Ross-Lee," said Dr. Penry, "who, in terms of osteopathic physicians, is one of the most notable in the country."

Barbara Ross-Lee, DO, has an extensive background in osteopathic medical education and health policy. After running a solo private practice in inner city Detroit early in her career, Dr. Ross-Lee served as chairperson of the

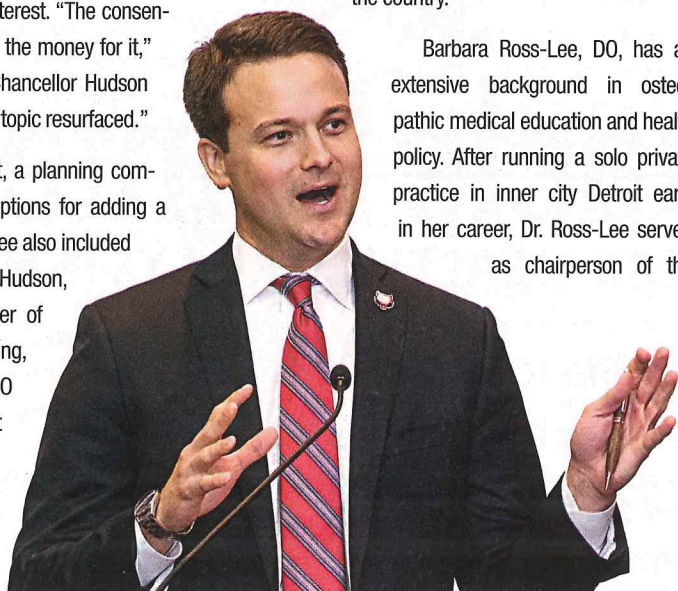
Department of Family Medicine at Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine. She was the first osteopathic physician accepted into the Robert Wood Johnson fellowship and later, was recruited by Ohio University College of Osteopathic Medicine as the first African-American female dean of a United States medical school. Dr. Ross-Lee has also testified before congressional committees and sat on several committees at the Institute of Medicine.

Today, Dr. Ross-Lee is the acting dean of the NYITCOM at A-State and a vice president of medical affairs for NYIT's College of Osteopathic Medicine. She recalls with fondness the initial meetings with A-State, and the impression the Arkansas school made on her and her NYIT colleagues. "When A-State approached NYIT in 2013 with the idea of opening a medical school site on its campus, we were compelled by the critical physician workforce need as well as the health status of Arkansas and the Delta. [Helping such an area] certainly parallels with the mission of the NYIT and with the College of Osteopathic Medicine in New York.

"From our perspective, we saw that Arkansas has done many things to recruit physicians into the state – scholarships, loan paybacks, etc. – even so, the workforce shortage was projected to get worse. We know that UAMS is making a heroic effort to supply physicians, but it is only one medical school.

"This school [NYITCOM at A-State] is absolutely a strategy to address the workforce shortages in Arkansas. It won't solve all of the health care challenges, but the health care challenges cannot be solved without a workforce."

The new medical school is housed inside Arkansas State's historic Wilson Hall. Through the partnership, NYIT benefits from established student services like the library, parking, security, facilities, IT, and more. In turn, A-State benefits from NYIT's established curriculum, faculty, and experience.



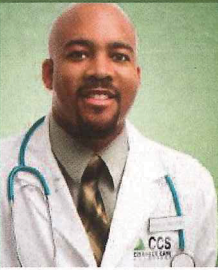
It's a win for both parties. "In terms of delivering medical education to this part of the state – where it is desperately needed – this was a creative way of doing it," explained Dr. Penry. "They benefit from our services, and we benefit by having a medical school on campus. Our students will have more opportunities to become a physician. Our STEM areas have grown already as students hear of the new medical school. Ultimately, Arkansans will benefit from this partnership."

Choosing an Osteopathic Approach

In looking at the feasibility** of an osteopathic medical school, A-State found that many osteopathic physicians go into primary care areas. "We know that where we start an osteopathic medical school program, students tend to stay in those regions," explained Dr. Ross-Lee, "and we know that students tend to practice where they come from. Even more, they tend to stay in areas where they are trained, in both undergrad and residency and graduate medical education."


Differences exist between the curriculums of a typical medical program and an osteopathic medical program, but not as many as one might think. "To become a licensed physician in this nation, you must attend one of the two types of medical schools – osteopathic or allopathic," explained Dr. Speights. "The two schools teach many of the exact same things. For instance, everybody takes gross anatomy, biochemistry, pharmacology, and pathophysiology. We all do rotations, with cardiologists, family doctors, pediatricians, and general surgeons. Both schools are about four years, with the first two in the classroom, the next two in rotations."

The difference, he said, is evident in the term *osteopathic*, which denotes an emphasis on manipulative medicine. Dr. Speights elaborates, "On the osteopathic side, we embrace the whole body. In my opinion, this can also occur in allopathic schools; it's just that we put that at the forefront. We have an osteopathic manipulative medicine lab and a common belief that the body has the ability to heal itself if given the chance. That's not to say that DOs do not prescribe antibiotics, chemotherapies, etc. They do. They can enter into any specialty, and they do. However, about 60% of DOs, nationally, migrate to generalist specialties (family medicine, pediatrics, general surgery, OB/GYN, emergency medicine). When we talk about the needs of the



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state, shortages in those general areas really stand out. This school is needed in this region.”

Dr. Penry agreed, and he pointed out that roughly half of the new school's enrolled students are native Arkansans. “This is about serving our state and about giving more Arkansans opportunity to attend medical school,” he said. “More than 10% of the first class is made up of Arkansas State graduates.”

Christina Carl is among that 10%. Having earned her Bachelor of Science in Biology from A-State in 2016, she applied and was accepted into the new medical school. Her interest in medicine – she hopes to be a neurosurgeon – grew out of personal experience.

During her senior year of high school, the Jonesboro native went in for a regular eye check-up and came out with a serious diagnosis for a patient of any age – a swollen optic nerve, caused by either a brain tumor or multiple sclerosis. After associated tests and determinations (neither proposed cause fit), she was left without reasons until a later time when a pediatric neurologist figured out her case. “He had listened to my story, read my chart over and over, and discovered the problem; my previous dermatologist had overdosed me for the past year, causing my swollen optic nerve. As I reflected back on the experience, I realized I had become fascinated with the clinical side of medicine. I was intrigued by the human body and by the professionals working in the medical field.”

Carl learned about NYIT and osteopathic medicine during her senior year of college. “The more I



learned, the more I fell in love with NYIT's holistic approach to health care,” said Carl. “It warms my heart to know that NYITCOM is in my hometown and will produce physicians with a fierce education.”

Addressing Residency

As plans for a school progressed, discussion turned to logistics. It wasn't as simple as seeing a need and opening the doors. A major challenge included how to approach residency.

“In order to open a school in an environment where a cap on funding of new residency programs exists, our challenge was to start residency training programs and to start and recruit an undergraduate medical student class,” admitted Dr. Ross-Lee. “There has been much publicity about not having enough residency slots for our students. We feel an obligation, and in fact, it is a requirement for accreditation, that we expand the number of residency-training slots if we're going to increase the number of students going into these slots. We've been able to do that.”

NYITCOM at A-State expanded residency slots, according to the site dean, by collaborating with hospitals for third and fourth-year training of students and by working with community-based hospitals to start residency-training

programs. “There is a cap by Medicare, who pays for residency training for physicians,” explained Dr. Ross-Lee. “Hospitals who currently have residency training can't expand them, but community hospitals – particularly those in rural and underserved areas who have never had residency training, can apply for residency training.”

Physician Involvement

As the NYITCOM at A-State gets underway, it means more medical students in the state. School officials as well as AMS have expressed an interest in working together for the benefit of these students, and ultimately, for the health of our state.

“Physicians are working hard every day,” said Dr. Speights, who is all too aware that doctors are sometimes seeing 40-50 or more patients a day. “We need a bigger workforce to handle the changing demands of health care today. We want to be a partner with physicians, hospitals, and health care organizations to raise the health of the population of the state. We want to help the workforce issue improve in Arkansas. If you share our vision, we'd love to work with you.”

“The two professions (MD and DO) are coming together now more than ever before,” added Dr. Ross-Lee. “We have the single path to residency training (rather than parallel pathways), and from my academic medicine perspective, our ability to develop a workforce to educate students for practice depends on having linkages with the medical professions. That is what the AMS and the AOMA [Arkansas Osteopathic Medical Association] represent. Ultimately, our students need that interaction, early on, to develop professionally;

Barbara Ross
Lee, MD



also, it provides a continuum of the medical professions as we go through changing times in health care. I'm excited about the possibility of the AMS being part of the education of our students and having our students and faculties engage with them."

In a recent newsletter from the organization, Arkansas Osteopathic Medical Association Executive Director Frazier Edwards also expressed excitement about NYITCOM at A-State and the Fort Smith-based Arkansas College of Osteopathic Medicine. "Arkansas' osteopathic profession will soon grow at exponential rates thanks to the two new institutions. These colleges will not only help to enhance the physician workforce, but aim at solving a fundamental need to serve our state's healthcare disparities. With those qualities, we express great excitement and pride from the state's professional osteopathic organization." Contact AOMA at 501-374-8900.

The Arkansas Medical Society is pleased to shine a light on this new program and its potential impact on the medical profession and the health of Arkansas. On behalf of the Society, AMS Executive Vice President David Wroten encouraged the state's medical students to reap the benefits of Arkansas Medical

Society participation. "The physician leadership and staff of the Arkansas Medical Society are looking forward to working with the students and faculty at our new medical schools," he said. "AMS physicians recognize that medical students are the future leaders of their profession and want to not only be supportive but also help them attain the skills and knowledge necessary to assume those leadership roles.

"The first thing the new students will learn about AMS is that the organization makes a strong commitment for the entire length of their medical training. From the first year of medical school through their final year as a medical resident, membership in the AMS is at no cost to the student. However, that's just the beginning."

For more information about NYITCOM at A-State, visit <http://www.nyit.edu/arkansas>.

* A separate osteopathic medical school is in development in Fort Smith. Affiliated with Arkansas Colleges of Health Education, The Arkansas College of Osteopathic Medicine has shared plans for an August 2017 inaugural class. Learn more: <http://arcomedu.org/news>.

NYITCOM at A-State Inaugural Class

Class size: 120

Students who are Arkansas residents or received a degree from a university in Arkansas: 58 (48.3%)

States represented: Arkansas, Missouri, Mississippi, Tennessee, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Texas

Average Age – 24

Average GPA – 3.6

Average MCAT score – 503 (new exam);
28 (old exam)

** "A feasibility study by nationally renowned Tripp Umbach in 2014 concluded a DO school in Jonesboro would help meet the demand for more primary care physicians in the Delta and have an initial \$70 million economic impact on Northeast Arkansas." – <http://www.astate.edu/news> AMS

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