OU School of Community Medicine to Graduate First Class of Physician Assistants

TULSA (Nov. 29, 2010) – The University of Oklahoma School of Community Medicine will hold convocation ceremonies for its first class of physician assistants at 6 p.m. on Friday, December 3, in Founder’s Hall of the OU-Tulsa Schusterman Learning Center.

Physician Assistants (PAs) are health care professionals authorized to practice medicine under the supervision of licensed physicians. PAs are authorized to perform similar tasks to those of physicians, including working in hospitals and medical clinics, assisting in surgeries and prescribing medications. Graduates of the PA program earn a Master of Health Science in Physician Assistant Studies degree and must pass a national certification exam before being licensed to practice.

The Physician Assistant Program is a collaboration between the OU School of Community Medicine and The University of Tulsa. TU offers courses in the biomedical sciences while the clinical skills classes are taught by PAs and physicians at the OU School of Community Medicine. Clinical education in patient care are completed at OU Physicians’ clinics, hospital partners, and other clinics in northeastern Oklahoma. In January, 2007, the
University of Oklahoma Board of Regents approved the creation of a new Master of Health Science degree in Physician Assistant Studies at the OU School of Community Medicine. Members of the first graduating class began studies in fall of 2008.

Presently, the only other PA program in the state is offered at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center in Oklahoma City. The Tulsa program compliments Oklahoma City’s in meeting the growing demand in the state for highly trained medical professionals. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics expects employment of Physician Assistants to grow by 39 percent from now until 2018, much faster than the average for all occupations. Projected rapid job growth reflects the expansion of healthcare industries and an emphasis on cost containment, which results in increasing use of PAs by healthcare establishments.

“A combination of student and employer demand made this program a priority for OU-Tulsa and the OU School of Community Medicine,” said OU-Tulsa President Gerard Clancy, M.D. “The program is a natural complement to our existing physician and residency programs by training more qualified health care professionals to care for the underserved areas of the state – both rural and urban.”

Almost all of the 20 graduates in the Tulsa program have already found employment in a variety of facilities in the region including the Indian Health Care Resource Center, Eddie Warrior Correctional Facility in Taft, Dick Conner Correctional Center in Hominy, St. John Medical Center, OU physicians, and other local physician groups.

Meredith Davison, Ph.D., M.P.H., who led the development of the program and currently serves as interim director, said “The OU School of Community Medicine PA program supports the mission of the school by helping alleviate the crucial need for medical professionals. In addition, several of our graduates will work in facilities that provide health care to the
underserved.” Davison also stressed the value of joining forces with the University of Tulsa.

“Without TU’s contribution, the program wouldn’t have been realized,” said Davison.

“The PA program is desperately needed in our community, and the cooperation between our two universities is an excellent example of two institutions working together for important societal needs,” said Allen Soltow, Ph.D., vice president for research at The University of Tulsa.

The University of Oklahoma School of Community Medicine is the first medical school of its kind in the nation. Created in 2008 with a $50 million donation from the George Kaiser Family Foundation, the school’s mission is to improve the health status of all Oklahomans, particularly those in underserved urban and rural areas. The OU School of Community Medicine and its physician practice, OU Physicians, has more than 300 physicians and some 70 medical students. They perform approximately 250,000 patient visits per year at 26 community clinics. For more information about the OU School of Community Medicine, call 660-3098 or visit http://tulsa.ou.edu.

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