

Feb. 16,
2005

TMA/AMA

University of Texas Houston Health Science Center School of Medicine

Role of GME in TX's Physician Workforce Needs

\$200,000 = the amount that Texas invests in each of its medical students

2,300 = number of Texas GME slots not paid by Medicare (the biggest financier of GME)

\$151 Million = the loss in Texas GME funding (from all sources) from 2002-3 compared to 2004-5

Graduate medical education (GME) refers to the specialized training students receive after completing medical school (i.e. residency). Additional GME slots are needed to retain more TX graduates and to prepare adequate numbers of physicians to meet the state's growing healthcare needs. Teaching hospitals have expressed concerns about their ability to sustain GME programs due to narrow operating margins and low financial reserves:

the number of slots supported by Medicare is currently frozen at 1996 levels and Medicaid GME funding was completely eliminated for the current biennium. Without enough slots, TX is losing graduates to other states. According to results of a 2004 survey of TX medical schools, a total of 137 (38%) of the graduates who left the state for GME training indicated they would have preferred to remain in Texas had a slot been available.

After years of hard work, training, and \$100,000+ in loans, are you willing to be forced to relocate out of TX (where your cost of living is lower and there is no state personal income tax here) for residency, just because funded GME slots have been cut by legislators in Austin? Your lawmakers need to hear from you and you need to know more about this issue. See what you can do: read below.

Other Topics to be Discussed at the Meeting this Wed.

- New \$5,000 scholarship for UT-Houston medical student member of TMA (TMA membership is free and application forms will be available at meeting).
- TMA student Lobby Day in Austin on Tues 4/5. Registration form due 3/18 to Chirag Patel. Free reception at Scholz Garden, NCAA Basketball Championship Game watch party, and housing on Monday night in Austin.
- Our chapter is adopting the HOMES Clinic for the homeless this Sunday 2/20. We can still sign up 3 more MS1/2 students.
- TMA state-wide Boards, Council, & Committee applications due 4/15. Great way to network with physicians from across the state.
- Plans underway for childhood obesity community service project.
- Baylor TMA/AMA Residency Fair coming up.

What can I do?

Your UT-Houston Student Section of the TMA/AMA is hosting a letter writing campaign this Wednesday 2/16. All you need to do is show up, provide your name and address (and a 1-2 sentence blurb about what you think about GME), and a letter will be printed out and placed in your MSB mailbox on Thursday 2/17 for you to sign (see letter template on reverse). Please sign the letter by Tuesday

2/22 and place it in Chirag Patel's MSB mailbox. We will then mail your letter to our Texas state legislators.

Will a letter campaign really work? Yes & no. One, two, or even ten letters probably will not catch anyone's attention. However, a coordinated effort can yield over a hundred letters from UT-H alone. Congressional offices wait until a critical mass of letters is received

before they will examine an issue. The other TX medical schools are also working on this GME funding campaign.

Email cpatel1@uth.tmc.edu if you would like to send a letter but cannot attend the meeting; otherwise, show up at Noon Feb. 16th in 3.001 for an informational meeting on this and many other opportunities (see sidebar).

February 16, 2005

[Senator or Representative]
[Contact information]

Dear Honorable [Senator or Representative] [Name],

As a constituent and medical student at the University of Texas Medical School at Houston, I hope you will take a few moments to read about my concerns regarding the status of Graduate Medical Education (GME) in Texas. **[YOUR 1-2 SENTENCE BLURB WILL GO HERE.** For example, you could write something like, "I was born and raised in Texas and would prefer to stay here for my residency training and eventual practice."]

GME is the training that physicians complete after graduation from medical school commonly known as residency. Residency slots are largely funded by the federal government through Medicare, however Medicare GME has undergone a series of damaging cuts due to erroneous predictions of physician oversupplies. As a result, GME slots funded by Medicare are frozen at 1996 levels. Under the current federal conditions, state support of GME slots is even more crucial.

In Texas a majority of state GME funds are allocated by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to help support primary care GME. In the 2002-2003 biennium this agency distributed \$52 million in state funds for GME. That was reduced by 53% to \$27.5 million for the current biennium. On top of that disastrous cut, Medicaid's longstanding role in supporting Texas GME was completely eliminated in 2004 and only a small amount of state funds has been restored, \$3 million, for a loss of an estimated \$124 million in state and federal matching funds.

Cuts in GME funding concern me for multiple reasons. First, Texas medical students will struggle to find desirable and appropriate residency positions in our state. More and more graduates will be forced to seek residency training out of state, which increases the likelihood that they will practice in another state. Texas invests approximately \$200,000 in every Texas medical graduate. The state would do better by keeping that investment here. Second, physician residents receive a relatively low stipend for their hard work. This low stipend helps keep the cost of healthcare down and increases access to care for the uninsured and underinsured. The loss of physician residents means less access to care for a large number of patients in Texas. Third, the predicted oversupply of physicians has failed to materialize and the real situation is quite the opposite. Solid predictions now show that we will suffer from a broad physician shortage in the near future.

I implore you to work within the legislature to restore funding of state GME programs to at least their previous level. It is also just as important to reinstate Medicaid GME funding to an acceptable level. I also hope that you will work with the Texas Congressional Delegation to increase support at the federal level for GME funding and adjustment of the 1996 caps on Medicare funded residency positions.

Thank you for your time and service to our great state and thank you for hearing my concerns.

Sincerely,

[Type Name]
Class of [Year]
UT-Houston Medical School
[Address that proves you're a constituent, i.e. address where you are registered to vote]