

ILLINOIS Bill of Health

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CONTACT:

Mark Rosati, UIC
312/996-5546
Nancy Zimmers, SIU
217/545-3854
Robyn Wheeler, CSU
773/995-2388

PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES OUTLINE 'BILL OF HEALTH' INITIATIVE TO PROTECT ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE IN ILLINOIS

*Proposal urges dedicated state funding to train physicians, dentists, nurses, pharmacists
and other healthcare practitioners*

SPRINGFIELD—Whether it is an outdated 50-year old pharmacy lab with rotary telephones at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), or a brand new, \$30-million research lab in Springfield at Southern Illinois University (SIU) School of Medicine that remains dark because the school lacks operating funds, healthcare colleges at Illinois' public universities are struggling to maintain viability amidst increasing costs and declining operating and capital funds. These challenges were highlighted today as UIC and SIU medical and health sciences students, faculty and alumni met with legislators to discuss *The Illinois Bill of Health*, a proposal by the universities along with Chicago State University (CSU) designed to prevent a critical shortage of healthcare practitioners in Illinois.

The *Illinois Bill of Health* seeks a dedicated stream of state funding to supplement the state's higher education budget to help support the rising cost of medical and healthcare education and training, as well as related patient care, at public universities in the state. While the needs of each university are unique, the collective challenges faced by the schools of medicine, dentistry, nursing, pharmacy, public health and allied health sciences at these public universities point to a looming crisis that could limit access to quality healthcare in Illinois.

"The cost of providing healthcare education and training far surpasses the amount UIC receives from tuition and diminishing state higher education appropriations," UIC Chancellor Sylvia Manning said. "Healthcare education is much more faculty- and technology-intensive than standard higher education. Additional funds are needed so we can continue to enroll the maximum number of students and instruct them using the latest methodologies and technologies."

"We are well aware of the state's budget challenges, but we must sound the alarm now," said University of Illinois President B. Joseph White. "We would not be requesting this long-term funding commitment if it were not absolutely critical for the future of healthcare in Illinois. If we agree that healthcare quality and access are important in our state, then we need to find a way to make the investment necessary to ensure the long-term viability of public healthcare education. We are eager and willing to work with the General Assembly, Governor and Illinois Board of Higher Education on finding ways to address this urgent and challenging issue."

Health sciences colleges at public universities in Illinois are facing financial challenges for several reasons, including double-digit annual increases in medical malpractice insurance, aging infrastructure requiring major renovation, the need to invest continually in new technology to keep current with the latest medical methodologies, and a decrease in state higher education funding.

Just this year alone, total medical malpractice premiums for the University of Illinois Medical Center, outpatient clinics and physicians at UIC were \$28 million—a 33 percent increase over the previous year, and more than double the cost from \$12 million in 2000.

Without additional state support for health sciences education, UIC, SIU and CSU may have to reduce enrollment or limit programs—jeopardizing Illinois' future supply of well-trained physicians, nurses, dentists, pharmacists and other medical professionals.

"Many of the young people we train to be physicians, dentists, and nurses end up practicing in medically underserved areas," said SIU President James E. Walker. "Producing highly trained healthcare professionals, who then provide medical services for so many of our communities, has been made possible through the state's consistent understanding of how SIU's healthcare programs impact the ability to deliver quality healthcare downstate. Despite difficult financial times, we must find a way to increase the educational investments that we have made in our healthcare system."

"Illinois already is experiencing a shortage of nurses and other health professionals and some health sciences schools in Illinois have closed," said Chicago State University Provost Beverley Anderson. "We should be expanding programs and adding students if we are to have any hope of meeting staffing needs in medicine and healthcare."

According to the Illinois Hospital Association, the current shortage for all hospital positions in 2002 was 8.7 percent. The IHA's benchmark is 7 percent. If the current vacancy trend continues, the shortages the state is experiencing now will only worsen. Specifically, the IHA estimates that the demand for nurses will exceed the supply by 21,400, or 20 percent, by the year 2020, unless more students enroll in nursing school.

"The number one challenge our hospitals face is recruiting and retaining top practitioners," said Ken Robbins, president of the Illinois Hospital Association. "The best way to improve recruitment of quality doctors, nurses and related professionals is to keep training a high level of these professionals right here in Illinois."

UIC, SIU and CSU have a major impact on healthcare training and delivery in the state. For example:

- UIC estimates that it educates one-sixth of all physicians currently practicing in Illinois, nearly half of the state's dentists and one-third of the state's pharmacists.
- Of the 290 medical students currently enrolled at SIU School of Medicine, 20 percent are minority, 36 percent are from rural Illinois communities and 75 percent are from downstate Illinois.
- CSU has graduated more than 50 percent of the African American baccalaureate degree nurses, health information administrators and occupational therapists from Illinois public universities.

- One in twenty Illinois practicing physicians has trained at the SIU School of Medicine since it opened in 1975. These alumni are working in 81 of Illinois' 102 counties.
- SIU School of Dental Medicine alumni represent more than 10 percent of all the dentists in Illinois. Some 66 percent of the SIU Edwardsville nursing graduates, or 2,640 registered nurses, work in Illinois
- UIC's Medical Center and related clinics, including dentistry and pharmacy, serve approximately 600,000 patient visits annually, 70 percent of whom are from medically underserved groups.
- SIU's School of Medicine and related clinics served approximately 322,000 visits by 104,000 patients in FY04. The medical school hosts patient care services and/or training programs in 62 Illinois communities.
- The UIC College of Dentistry is the state's largest provider of Medicaid dental services, with 22,500 patient visits annually.
- The SIU School of Dental Medicine operates patient clinics in Alton, Edwardsville, and East St. Louis. In FY04, it managed 36,315 patient visits, including dental treatment for 2,286 Medicaid patients.
- UIC is currently the third-largest producer of minority physicians in the nation.

"Beyond healthcare, nurses contribute to the economic growth of the communities in which they work and reside," said Marcia Maurer, dean of the SIUE School of Nursing. "Supporting health science education contributes in the long run to the economy of the state."

"This *Bill of Health* is really a bill of rights," said Margaret Blackshere, president of the Illinois AFL-CIO, which represents more than one million union members in the state. "Our members cite healthcare access and benefits as a top concern, and our state must support that fundamental right as best it can."

All three universities share a mission of training medical and healthcare practitioners from underserved groups and geographically diverse areas of the state. Currently, alumni of UIC, SIU, and CSU's health sciences colleges are practicing in nearly every county in Illinois.

"Illinoisans expect and deserve to have access to quality healthcare in their own neighborhoods," said Craig Backs, MD, president of the Illinois State Medical Society. "Our public universities help ensure this access by training students who we hope will serve future generations of patients in Illinois."

Maintaining affordable tuition for in-state students is critical to the mission of training healthcare professionals from under-represented groups and geographically diverse areas of Illinois. As such, all three universities have kept tuition low in comparison to true education costs so as not to put education out of reach.

For example, the cost to educate a medical or dental student for one year at UIC is \$85,000 compared to in-state tuition of \$25,000 per year. The cost to educate a dental

student at SIU is \$62,400, compared to \$19,100 tuition. SIU Edwardsville's nursing program spends \$14,700 per undergraduate student and \$24,800 per graduate student, compared to tuition of \$4,800 and \$4,400 respectively.

"I chose medicine because I want to give something back to my community, and I value the fact that I was able to stay close to home to complete my education and training," said Ted Clark, a third year medical student at SIU School of Medicine from Carterville. "But just as I am investing in my education, our leaders need to invest in our medical schools, because we need modern equipment, good facilities and sufficient faculty if our education is going to fully prepare us to care for our communities."

Representatives of the three universities are meeting with legislators, the Governor's office and other policymakers across the state to work toward a long-term solution that will allow significant investment to accommodate newer technologies, meet growing student demand and continue educating top-quality healthcare professionals who serve the public in all corners of the state.

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