Duquesne University to Launch College of Osteopathic Medicine

Duquesne University recently announced plans to establish a College of Osteopathic Medicine (COM) that is targeted to open and admit its first class in fall semester 2023. It will be the second medical school in Pittsburgh and the first Catholic osteopathic medical school in Pennsylvania.

The COM will recruit an initial class of 75, with the intention of growing enrollment during its initial years to a total of 600 students enrolled at full maturity. Doctors of osteopathic medicine primarily serve as family doctors or general practitioners, for which there is a significant national need. In April, The Association of American Medical Colleges published a study illustrating a coming shortage of as many as 122,000 physicians.

The University has begun a national search for a founding COM dean. It seeks a scholar and practitioner who appreciates the changing demands of health care around the world and the importance of integrative approaches to the field.

Discussions of creating an osteopathic medical school arose during the University’s development of the 2018-2023 strategic plan, Re-Imagining Duquesne’s Spiritan Legacy for a New Era. Encouraging results from a feasibility study with globally recognized consulting firm Tripp Umbach led to the administration’s decision to pursue accreditation.

“This major leap forward for Duquesne, Pittsburgh and our region is a bold move that recognizes how health care requires new kinds of practitioners,” Duquesne President Ken Gormley says.

Gormley candidly admits he’s somewhat surprised that a major metropolitan area like Pittsburgh, with its renowned health care systems and options, doesn’t already have an osteopathic medical school.

“Given Duquesne’s broad strengths in elements connected to integrative health—in pharmacy, nursing, the natural sciences, health sciences and even in business and music—we are exceptionally well-suited to serve this need in our region,” Gormley says. “Training highly qualified family doctors also directly aligns with our mission as a Catholic Spiritan University.”

LAUNCH AND ACCREDITATION

The accreditation process for osteopathic medical schools (which can take up to three years) requires placing a founding dean in charge to recruit faculty, design curriculum, identify and construct space for instruction and recruit students. Accreditation is reserved until a school can demonstrate its ability to provide instruction, and recruit and graduate students with viable degrees.

“We’ve planned well for this move and will succeed in creating this resource at Duquesne,” Provost Dr. David Dausey notes. “We envision a school of medicine that ties together interprofessional opportunities across all of our health programs.”

Dausey explains that the vision for the COM is tied to integrative health and medicine. “Integrative medicine considers the medical practitioner and the patient as partners not only in healing but also in prevention and general wellness,” he says. “Integrative health values what often is termed ‘western’ scientific approaches to medicine just as much as conceptions of health, wellness and other cultural approaches to healing.”

In addition to practitioner training, Duquesne’s COM will include work in the ethics of integrative medicine and a focus on serving marginalized populations, aligning integrative health practice with Spiritan values of service that have been a hallmark of Duquesne for more than 140 years.

“At the core, we seek a leader to educate medical students to look at the mind, body and spirit of their patients, to be with them and to listen to their concerns,” Dausey adds. “While such practice certainly is about curing, it is equally about caring.”

THE RIGHT PLACE, THE RIGHT TIME

With its many highly ranked programs and national draw for students, Duquesne is well-positioned. The University’s nine schools span business, education, health sciences, law, liberal arts, music, natural sciences, nursing and pharmacy. The College of Osteopathic Medicine will be Duquesne’s 10th school.

“It will be more than just a tenth school. The College of Osteopathic Medicine will be a hub, synthesizing in some ways all that we do well,” Dausey says. “Because integrative health demands cultural competencies, liberal arts also is involved. We have a music therapy program here. The connections between law and medicine are numerous. Education is as much about wellness as it is about knowledge, and business concerns can both aggravate and ameliorate health challenges. Our strengths in the allied and practical health fields are obvious. We have an abundance of talent and expertise here to work with.”

“The University of Pittsburgh has an internationally recognized medical school, focused on M.D. and Ph.D. offerings,” Dausey added. “Trends show medical students trained at major academic medical centers tend to practice primarily in medical sub-specialties, while osteopaths are more likely to become general practitioners, where the need for more physicians is even greater.”

Duquesne officials and Tripp Umbach consultants conferred with representatives from regional universities, medical professionals and a variety of individuals in city and state government while exploring the potential for the College of Osteopathic Medicine. Duquesne officials confirm the plans were met with enthusiasm, with regional hospitals noting that even with existing medical schools in the area, their needs for residents and interns remained high, particularly for osteopathic practitioners.