Physician Assisting

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The University of Dayton has hired a director to lead the development of a proposed physician assistant program expected to enroll students in August 2014.

Sue Wulff, a certified physician assistant, will begin July 16. Her responsibilities will include the hiring of five full-time program faculty, overseeing facility renovation, coordinating clinical rotation sites and developing curriculum for a proposed Master of Physician Assistant Practice program.

Since 2002, Wulff has served as director of the Kettering College physician assistant program. After earning a degree in physician assisting in 1979, she worked for 18 years in orthopedic surgery in the Miami Valley.

"Health care reform and the growing need for primary care is increasing demand for physician assistants," said Wulff. "Ultimately, I'd like to see the University of Dayton program be recognized nationally as one of the top PA programs in the nation. And as someone who likes to be an agent of change, it's invigorating to have the opportunity to help build a program from the ground up."

The University of Dayton board of trustees approved the program proposal in January. The program still requires approval from the Ohio Board of Regents and the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA).

The proposed PA program is a natural fit for the University's School of Education and Allied Professions (SOEAP), which already includes clinical graduate programs in physical therapy, school psychology and community counseling. At the undergraduate level, the SOEAP offers competitive programs in pre-physical therapy, dietetics, exercise physiology and exercise science.

"Sue Wulff brings a wealth of experience as a physician assistant, educator and administrator to this position," said Kevin Kelly, SOEAP dean. "We are very pleased to add her to our faculty and look forward to her leadership in developing the PA program, which will serve the needs of our region and add another high-quality graduate program to our school."

Physician assistants practice medicine under the supervision of physicians, including surgeons, and are formally trained to provide diagnostic, therapeutic and preventive healthcare services, as delegated by a physician.

According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, employment of physician assistants is expected to grow by 39 percent from 2008 to 2018. This growth is expected as the scope of physician assistant practice expands to include procedures previously reserved only for physicians in order to contain health care costs.

Ohio currently has six accredited PA programs, with only one — at the Kettering College of Medical Arts — in southwest Ohio.

"The hospitals of the Dayton region and the University of Dayton have been working very closely to ensure the current and future workforce needs are met," said Bryan Bucklew, president and CEO of the Greater Dayton Area Hospital Association. "The demand for physician assistants will continue to increase as continuity of care and integration of electronic health information becomes even more integral in providing acute and post-acute care to populations that are experiencing higher instances of chronic conditions."

The initial proposal for the program calls for up to 30 students in the first year, 35 in the second with a target of 40 students in subsequent years. The 27-month, seven-semester program would be located on the fourth floor of the University's College Park Center, two floors above the University's doctor of physical therapy program.

For information on the program, contact Sue Wulff at swulff1@udayton.edu.

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