

SpotLight

El Paso Medical School

New Facility Kindles Hopes for Well-Paying Jobs

El Paso's efforts to move beyond low-wage manufacturing and services jobs will get a boost from next year's opening of a new medical school. Along with other new and expanded health care facilities, the school could serve as a catalyst for bringing well-paying professional jobs to West Texas.

The Paul L. Foster School of Medicine will be the 10th medical school in Texas and the state's first new one since 1977. Perhaps more important, it will be the first U.S. medical school along the 2,000-mile border with Mexico.

The new medical school figures to have a large impact on a metropolitan area of 2.4 million people, which includes the Mexican city of Juárez. According to one study, the 10-year increase in economic activity (directly and through multipliers) will be an additional \$1.3 billion in business revenue, \$462 million in income to El Paso households, \$12 million in net operating income for local government and 4,700 new jobs.¹

The new four-year school is among several major health care projects under way in El Paso. Thomason Hospital, Texas Tech's partner in medical training for 40 years, has begun a \$250 million expansion project that includes a new children's hospital.

Turning an El Paso satellite for doctor training into a fully accredited four-year medical school moved toward reality in 2003, when the Texas Legislature approved \$45 million in revenue bonds for three new classroom and research buildings, followed by a \$48 million appropriation in 2007 to hire faculty and obtain accreditation.

Private donations of \$83 million from the El Paso community exceeded expectations, with \$50 million coming from refinery owner Paul L. Foster, the school's namesake. Accreditation, received early this year, completed a process that put the school on track to open its doors to 80 first-year students in the fall of



El Paso's new Paul L. Foster School of Medicine will be the only accredited four-year medical school along the U.S.–Mexico border.

2009. Accreditation also secures the school a permanent place in the state budget for normal operations.

The new medical school's roots can be traced to a partnership between the city of El Paso and the Texas Tech University School of Medicine that began in 1973 with the arrival of third- and fourth-year medical students as well as graduate residents. Thirty-five years later, the city has eight residency programs operated by the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center and another cosponsored with William Beaumont Army Medical Center.² In 2007, 46 El Paso-based medical students and 56 residents graduated from the program.

Beyond its role in physician training, the Texas Tech facility served more than 200,000 patients in El Paso and West Texas in 2007, operating 11 clinics in El Paso County, with 1,200 faculty and staff members.

The new medical school is something rarely found in poor border cities—a prestigious, well-paying institution. It will bring future medical professionals into one of the most underserved regions of the U.S. for health care, both on the border and in the rural areas of West Texas.

The Foster school is located in south El Paso, two minutes by car from Juárez and among some of El Paso's poorest neighborhoods. The site underscores its mission to study illnesses prevalent along the U.S.–Mexico border, such as diabetes and infectious diseases. In addition, officials hope the school's location will attract students who speak Spanish, enhancing the ability to serve the most rapidly growing part of the Texas population.

—Roberto Coronado and Robert W. Gilmer

Notes

¹ Economic impacts are based on a 10-year period and dollar values in present values. For details, see "The Expansion of Texas Tech University School of Medicine: Economic Impact on El Paso, Texas, Over 2004–2013," by David A. Schauer, Dennis L. Soden and David Coronado, Institute for Policy and Economic Development, University of Texas at El Paso, Technical Report no. 2004-8, 2004. Available at http://digitalcommons.utep.edu/iped_techrep.

² The residency programs include emergency medicine, family medicine, internal medicine, neuropsychiatry, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics, surgery and a transitional year. An orthopedics program is shared with William Beaumont Army Medical Center.

