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WMU School of Medicine Structure

In the past few months, I have been asked on several occasions to discuss the WMU School of Medicine (SOM) and its structure and its relationship to the “rest” of the University. To answer this question, it is important to provide some background and context.

First and foremost, as President I made a firm commitment that funds for the School of Medicine could not be taken from our limited state resources. To do so would impact and possibly diminish other academic programs. We chose an alternative path to fund the SOM. This meant that the SOM financing would rely on philanthropy, medical student tuition, clinical revenue, grants and contracts, and funds from our hospital partners, Borgess and Bronson.

Second, it was clear that the success of the medical school will be dependent upon a solid and strong relationship with our hospital partners. Specifically, Borgess and Bronson are the owners and primary support for the Kalamazoo Center for Medical Studies. The hospitals are also the sponsors and providers of Graduate Medical Education for the community, i.e., the residency programs. Strong medical schools have as their foundation, pre-medicine, Undergraduate Medical Education (M.D. program), Graduate Medical Education (residency) and continuing medical education. Given that WMU would provide some of the ingredients for a comprehensive medical school, but not all, it was decided that a partnership with the hospitals was not only required, but the right thing to do. This decision meant, then, that the WMU SOM in partnership with Bronson and Borgess
would create a separate and distinct entity as a non-profit 501(c) (3) with Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws. The required documents were developed, signed by the three parties, and submitted for approval.

Given that the WMU SOM would be a distinct and separate entity, we were required to submit to the State of Michigan a request for authority to offer degrees through the new WMU SOM. The latter request has been approved and we are authorized to grant the MD degree through the WMU SOM. We also have been in conversation with the Higher Learning Commission and we anticipate that they, too, will require the new educational entity (WMU SOM) to go through a separate and discrete accreditation from Western Michigan University.

The WMU SOM, as outlined in its Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws, will be governed by a Board of Directors comprised of representatives from WMU, Bronson, Borgess and a representative member of the faculty. The Board of Directors for the Kalamazoo Center for Medical Studies (KCMS), owned and supported by the hospitals, have voted to become part of the new WMU SOM. KCMS, which has been in existence for over 39 years, employs 60 faculty and a number of staff personnel who provide education and clinical services.

While the structure of the WMU SOM is unique it provides a wonderful opportunity for the University, community, State and Nation. Not only will the school provide outstanding state-of-the-art physicians, it will help to generate additional research opportunities for WMU faculty and students. There will, of course, be a very strong and symbiotic relationship with
Western Michigan University faculty, staff, and students. This will include teaching opportunities, research endeavors, and service to others via health-related programs. WMU students will also have the opportunity to be engaged in research and pre-clinical opportunities, etc. It is understood that WMU faculty when engaged in teaching in the WMU-SOM will be provided released time and their salaries will be covered by the WMU SOM. Likewise research endeavors will be structured such that returned overhead dollars and time devoted to the grant will be shared according to the appropriate FTE distribution.

The creation of partnerships is never easy, but when they are successful they are powerful in their ability to maximize resources to the betterment of society. I believe the WMU SOM is an example of a community pulling together to achieve a larger picture that will bring distinction to WMU, our community and a much brighter future.