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MEDIA RELEASE

Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine Chooses Mercy Jefferson for New Regional Campus

FESTUS, Mo., and Erie, Pa. (EMBARGOED UNTIL March 7, 2024, 4 a.m.) – Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine (LECOM), the nation’s largest medical college with a flagship campus in Erie, Pennsylvania, will open a new regional campus this summer in Festus, Missouri, at Mercy Hospital Jefferson, its first Midwest location.

“When we visited Mercy Jefferson, we saw firsthand the robust health care services they provide their community,” said Dr. Michael Rowane, LECOM associate dean of clinical education. “The level of care provided here to patients is exactly what we need so our students can receive the variety of clinical experiences necessary for them to become excellent physicians.”

The collaboration between LECOM and Mercy reflects a shared vision and values. In addition to preparing students to become physicians, pharmacists, dentists and podiatrists, LECOM serves its communities by addressing health care needs and improving the overall quality of life for residents. LECOM’S mission mirrors Mercy’s mission, which follows the heritage of the Sisters of Mercy by bringing care where it is needed and serving people where they live.

“It’s important to have an honest collaboration such as this in bringing together a shared vision,” said Dr. Silvia M. Ferretti, LECOM provost, senior vice president and dean of academic affairs. “We find that in working together with Mercy Jefferson, our mutual goals of serving those in need will be met.”

LECOM chose Mercy Jefferson for its rural setting; rural communities need additional support to sustain health care resources. Rural health care facilities also provide medical students who want to serve rural areas the chance to learn in the same setting.

About 70% of LECOM graduates become primary care physicians. Mercy prioritizes increasing the number of primary care physicians to ensure patients have the access they need to maintain good health and prevent the necessity for hospital care, particularly important in a rural setting where there are often fewer health care options.

“Medical students often grow to love the communities where they undergo their training. After all, they’ll be here several years,” Dr. Rowane said. “Frequently, once these students become doctors, they choose to stay in the community.”

The LECOM regional campus includes the added benefit of the school’s Early Acceptance Program. Through this program, LECOM and Mercy will team with local high schools and colleges to identify potential medical school candidates and guide them in earning an advanced degree.

“Less than 7% of Jefferson Country residents have earned a master’s degree or higher,” said Dr. Karthik Iyer, Mercy Jefferson chief medical officer, who will serve as LECOM regional dean. “We



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see a tremendous opportunity for us to grow that number by removing potential barriers and improving access to higher education.”

LECOM seeks to assist applicants who are the first in their family to enter higher education. It offers one of the lowest tuition fees in the nation for private medical colleges and provides financial aid to 89% of its students.

The first cohort of 12 medical students will arrive this summer, and the regional campus will grow over the years to as many as 72 medical students. Mercy Jefferson will provide all clinical rotations training students to become skilled, compassionate physicians, and Mercy Jefferson clinicians will have the opportunity to serve as medical education faculty.

“The chance to serve as faculty is a big draw for many physicians,” Dr. Iyer said. “I’ve spoken to several doctors who told me serving at a teaching hospital swayed them to stay. It will undoubtedly help us recruit additional physicians to Mercy Jefferson, which is a huge win for the entire community.”

“We are immensely proud of what this regional campus means for Jefferson County,” said Dan Eckenfels, Mercy Jefferson Communities president. “The project was spearheaded by Mercy regional president Eric Ammons, who took the idea and connected us with Dr. Rowane and LECOM, a pivotal starting point in getting us where we are today. I look forward to seeing how Dr. Iyer and the LECOM team grow this program and make it a crown jewel of Jefferson County.”

In 2023, the [Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine](#) (LECOM) celebrated its 30th anniversary. Founded in 1992, LECOM has grown to become the largest medical school in the country. Enrollment in the College of Osteopathic Medicine, School of Pharmacy, School of Dental Medicine, School of Podiatric Medicine, School of Health Services Administration and Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences has surpassed 4,400 students at campuses in Erie and Greensburg, Pa., Bradenton, Fla., and Elmira, N.Y. LECOM consistently graduates more primary care physicians than any other U.S. medical college while maintaining one of the lowest tuitions of any private medical school in the country. The college is the core of the nation’s only osteopathic academic health center, LECOM Health, a highly innovative, multifaceted health care and education system. Today nearly 16,000 LECOM alumni are providing health care to patients across the U.S.

[Mercy](#), one of the 20 largest U.S. health systems and named the top large system in the U.S. for excellent patient experience by NRC Health, serves millions annually with nationally recognized care and one of the nation’s largest and highest performing Accountable Care Organizations in quality and cost. Mercy is a highly integrated, multi-state health care system including more than 50 acute care and specialty (heart, children’s, orthopedic and rehab) hospitals, convenient and urgent care locations, imaging centers and pharmacies. Mercy has over 900 physician practice locations and outpatient facilities, more than 4,500 physicians and advanced practitioners and 50,000 co-workers serving patients and families across Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma. Mercy also has clinics, outpatient services and outreach ministries in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. In fiscal year 2023 alone, Mercy provided more than half a billion dollars of free care and other community benefits, including traditional charity care and unreimbursed Medicaid.
