

Grants will help residents displaced by record hospital closure

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What stands out about your second day of internship? Was that the day you first made a good impression with your chief or attending?

On their second day as interns this summer, the new medical residents at Philadelphia's nearly 500-bed Hahnemann University Hospital found themselves at an all-employee meeting, receiving news of the hospital's imminent closure.

All told, 571 Hahnemann medical residents and fellows suddenly found themselves in a search for new positions. It's widely believed to be a record for the number of physicians in training displaced by a single hospital closure, greater even than the displacement resulting from the closing of New Orleans' Charity Hospital after Hurricane Katrina. Hahnemann is set to close permanently Sept. 6.

The AMA recognizes the deep financial hardships related to relocation expenses and has committed \$50,000 to assist the residents and fellows affected. The AMA Foundation has committed another \$20,000 to help.

The American Osteopathic Association, American Board of Medical Specialties, the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), Council of Medical Specialty Societies, National Board of Medical Examiners, Pennsylvania Medical Society (PAMED), Philadelphia County Medical Society (PCMS), and many other organizations have financially committed funds to support them during this difficult transition, with the goal of raising \$150,000 all told for Hahnemann University Displaced Resident Fund. The Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) has a fund for residents with a J-1 visa.

Affected residents and fellows can apply to Philadelphia County Medical Society Educational and Scientific Trust for financial help with relocation costs, and reimbursements will be distributed from the Hahnemann University Displaced Resident Fund starting Sept. 15. The deadline for applications is Nov. 1.

“We all knew it was possible,” Robert J. Kucejko, MD, who started his fourth year of clinical duties as a surgical resident at Hahnemann, said in an interview of the rumors that had swirled around the struggling hospital for some time.

“We’d run the gamut of emotions before, then nothing materialized,” said Dr. Kucejko, who is married and has a son starting school in September. “Then it was like: all right—it’s finally happening. Let’s just take care of it and move on with our lives.”

The AMA has stepped up for the affected physicians in training, with letters to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services as well as the State Department, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, and the ECFMG. The AMA urged officials to help transitioning residents by waiving typical requirements, ensuring that federal funds follow the residents, and extending a grace period for J-1 visa-holding residents.

Nearly all of Hahnemann’s residents and fellows have secured other positions. The AMA joined forces with PAMED, PCMS, the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, AAMC and the ECFMG to facilitate a smooth transition.

Among the residents to find new training homes is Dr. Kucejko, who in early August started at Jefferson University Hospitals in Philadelphia.