JWU Opens State’s First Physician Assistant Program

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PROVIDENCE – Johnson & Wales University has added another ‘White Coat’ to its experiential programs with the grand opening of the first Center for Physician Assistant Studies Program in Rhode Island on May 29.

The 24 inaugural students, selected from an applicant pool of nearly 1,000, took visitors on a tour of the former jewelry facility at 35 Claverick Street, several blocks from one of the program’s partners, the Alpert Medical School. Their future is as bright as the white coats they donned for the first time last week.

During his welcoming remarks, GEORGE BOTTOMLEY, DVM, PA-C, program director, said the university’s preliminary study into launching the program predicted a robust 10-year job growth rate in the PA field, with a median starting salary of $93,000.

The 24-month program, with a year of classroom/laboratory studies followed by a clinical year, culminates in a master of science degree in physician assistant studies. The Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant, Inc. (ARC-PA) has granted Accreditation-Provisional status.

Dr. Bottomley, who returned to his native Rhode Island to found the program, noted having a relationship with a medical school is an essential partnership to the program. “All of our students will benefit from the interdisciplinary opportunities,” he said.

He and the PA program faculty and staff have been working closely with Alpert’s Dean Jack Elias, Associate Dean Allan Tunkel and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Dr. Michele G. Cyr. At the inaugural ceremony she quoted an African proverb which, she said, “aptly captures the spirit of the partnership that our schools have forged. ‘If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.’

“All of the opportunities we create for our students to work side by side will lay the groundwork for them to work together as a team in their careers. Together they will provide the best care for patients and populations. Alone, they might go faster but together they will go farther,” she said.

JWU’s Providence Campus President Mim L. Runey, LP.D, said the mission of the Center is to educate students...
to become “collaborative practitioners with the respect, empathy and trust inherent to patient-centered, humanistic health care.”

It was an emotional day for JWU Chancellor John J. Bowen ’77, who described himself as the son of a factory worker, and then recalled the jewelry workers who worked here when the building opened in 1948. “Their lives never got any better. It is very symbolic to take this old dilapidated building and bring new life into it and transform it. What will really make the reputation of this program are the students we educate here to help others.”

Maria Ghazal, RN, chief executive officer of the Rhode Island Free Clinic, spoke at the welcoming ceremony and described the clinic as a place which “provides a medical home for those who don’t have any other options in the state.”

She put faces on the populations the clinic serves: “Adults who now have insurance but can’t get an appointment for 6 months. Our diverse populations have difficulties understanding the present health care system and how to access it. This program will help our state in so many meaningful ways. We cannot do this work alone; it takes partnerships with academia, business, and other healthcare organizations.”

The free clinic will be a placement site for students where clinic physicians have readily volunteered to serve as preceptors.

Inside the temperature-cooled anatomy lab, half a dozen students showed visitors the state-of-the-art equipment at each station. They pondered their first lab experience in the room a few days hence with excitement and a bit of trepidation, and then moved on to show visitors the brightly-colored student lounge and locker rooms.

And for the university it is a beginning as well; JWU plans a further expansion into the health sciences as part of its five-year strategic plan.

Krista Murphy, in front, spoke at the welcoming ceremony on behalf of her fellow PA students. She said the inaugural class would build the cornerstone of the Center’s mission to educate collaborative practitioners embodying humanistic medicine.

Former hospital lab technician and new PA student Andrew Rowles explains the technology in the Clinical Skills Lab, which replicates a hospital ED room or physician’s exam room.

Students in the Gross Anatomy Lab which feature e-study guides at each station and screens which can project close-ups during instruction.