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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

SPONSOR Torraco **ORIGINAL DATE** 1/25/16 **LAST UPDATED** _____ **HB** _____

SHORT TITLE Expedited Physician Assistant Degrees at UNM **SM** 28

ANALYST Chilton

ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation		Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY16	FY17		
	Some Administrative Expenses	Nonrecurring	UNM HSC Operating Funds

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Responses Received From

Higher Education Department (HED)

University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center (UNM HSC, as reported through HED)

Responses Not Received From

Department of Health (DOH)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Memorial

This Memorial would ask the Board of Regents of the University of New Mexico to commission a study to look at the possibility of decreasing the amount of time a physician assistant (PA) entering medical school would spend in medical school, as a means to increasing the number of physicians practicing in underserved portions of the state. The memorial cites the 2015 Health Care Workforce Report in noting that the state has an overall deficiency of 145 primary care physicians and 136 physician assistants below national benchmarks, in addition to many other specialists being deficient in numbers. Making the problem more severe is that New Mexico has a higher proportion of physicians over age 60 than any other state, limiting their future practice duration.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

UNM would be asked to see to the preparation of a report on this initiative, bearing its administrative costs.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

Physician assistants must practice under the supervision of New Mexico licensed physicians. Those opting for the expedited UNM program (probably three years in duration instead of the usual four) would, after graduation from UNM still need to spend at least three years in an approved residency program before being able to go out into practice. HED notes that during this period of at least six years, it is possible that the number of physician assistants practicing would be *reduced* by the number choosing to attend medical school.

HED further notes that slightly over 50% of the 694 physician assistants in New Mexico are practicing in Bernalillo County, and approximately 40% of the total are engaged in primary care. It is probable that PAs practicing outside the metropolitan area are more likely to be in primary care.

HED quotes Dr. Vanessa Hawker of UNM HSC as stating that an expedited program for PAs would probably require approval from the Liaison Committee on Medical Education, which according to its website “is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as the reliable authority for the accreditation of medical education programs leading to the MD degree.” Dr. Hawker also noted that such a program might be limited to those who had obtained their PA education at UNM HSC.

This memorial is addressed only to the School of Medicine at UNM; the Burrell School of Osteopathic Medicine states that it has no plans for an expedited program for physician assistants at this time.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

HED notes that the UNM School of medicine would be required to bear the administrative costs of the study.

ALTERNATIVES

HED states that UNM HSC has listed a number of possible actions that might be taken to increase the supply of primary care providers in underserved portions of New Mexico, as follows:

- Reducing medical school from 4 years to 3 for a select number of students who commit to entering Family Medicine residency here after 3 years of medical school;
- Increasing the amount of funding available for loan repayment for primary care providers in rural and underserved areas of the state;
- Continuing to work toward reducing medical student debt;
- Funding additional primary care residency slots;
- Assisting rural and underserved communities as they recruit providers. Santa Rosa is one example of a best practice in recruiting. With community engagement, retention of providers increases exponentially; and

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- Expanding opportunities for medical students to train in rural areas as a way of connecting students with communities and supporting their interest in primary care. A pilot program is underway with HRSA grant funding (Rob Williams, principal investigator). This is based on successful programs in other states and could be expanded.

LAC/jo