

Scholarship Programs Make a Difference

—By Judi Engle

Tomorrow's doctors have many of the same challenges today's physicians once faced. They, too, must go through a competitive application procedure to get into medical school, choose a rewarding specialty, and pay for student loans.

Virginia Kettering, a long-term supporter of Wright State University School of Medicine, understood the concerns of those interested in becoming physicians. She wanted the community to retain its best and brightest young people. To that end, Mrs. Kettering supported the development of the Early Assurance Program at the medical school.

This program allows talented undergraduate students at area colleges to apply for admittance to medical school at the end of their sophomore year. Students must meet high academic standards and demonstrate dedication to human concerns, leadership ability, empathy, compassion, altruism, and maturity. Once accepted by the school's Admissions Committee, the students are guaranteed a slot at Wright State's medical school when they complete their undergraduate work.

The program provides accepted students with opportunities to develop their readiness and interest in medicine, including advanced science and research summer programs, shadowing first- and second-year medical students, and attending school events.

Students in this year's Early Assurance Program are also eligible for a four-year, 75 percent scholarship. Paul Carlson, Ph.D., associate dean for admissions and student affairs, believes that Mrs. Kettering's vision will result in retaining "ideal candidates for the medical profession in our community. Two scholarships will be awarded this year, with the recipients to be announced this spring.

"This program is another powerful example of Mrs. Kettering's impact on medical education," says Howard Part, M.D., dean of the medical school. "It has enabled us to attract highly competitive medical applicants to Wright State, and it brings us closer to our partnering institutions and to the Engineers Club of Dayton, which reviews scholarship applications. Mrs. Kettering's vision benefits the entire community."

Her vision also has helped medical students examine both specialty choice and practice location. In 1996, Mrs. Kettering and The Kettering Fund established the E.W. Kettering Family Scholarship for Geriatric Medicine. Its intent is to ensure that the community has enough physicians to care for the increasing numbers of elderly. The \$25,000 scholarship encourages students to expand their knowledge of geriatric medicine and requires that they make a two-year commitment to practice in the Dayton area upon completion of residency training.

These two programs are examples of the types of scholarship support available for medical students. Wright State's School of Medicine has more than 50 scholarship opportunities for medical students. There are both need- and academic-based scholarships, as well as specialty specific ones. Others are granted for leadership abilities and community service. Many are named after distinguished faculty or alumni. In 2003, 270 of the school's 360 students received some scholarship support.

Besides student loans, scholarships are an important part of the financial aid package for many students. Wright State's Class of 2003 averaged \$116,000 of debt, a figure close to the national average, by graduation day. Without scholarship support, that figure would be closer to \$137,000, according to the school's Financial Aid Office. And, as tuition increases, so will the need for this kind of assistance.

Professional societies and the Association of American Medical Colleges are becoming concerned that this level of debt may discourage the "best and brightest" from pursuing their dreams. Jordan Cohen, M.D., the association's president, speaks to this issue, "We can only speculate about how many outstanding candidates for medicine are being lost to the profession simply because the prospect of incurring such a large debt is too daunting for them and their families to contemplate. This concern is, of course, especially worrisome for youngsters from disadvantaged backgrounds."

With continued support from the community and programs such as those developed by Virginia Kettering, Wright State will continue to recruit the "best and brightest" to the field of medicine.