

# Nevada students should fill limited residency slots



(Las Vegas Review-Journal)

Shelley Berkley Special to the Review-Journal

July 25, 2020 - 9:00 pm

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As the CEO and senior provost of the largest medical school in the state of Nevada, Touro University College of Osteopathic Medicine, I was extremely disappointed in the July 4 article that appeared in the Review Journal “Grenada doctors hope to alleviate Las Vegas primary care shortage.” While we do need more physicians to meet the need in our state, it is disheartening to have

fourteen residency spots filled by graduates of a Caribbean medical school who have no ties to Nevada and no plans to practice in our state.

We should be filling the scarce residency positions with graduates of accredited Nevada medical schools.

During the 2015 legislative session, the three medical schools (Touro, UNLV and UNR) along with Roseman University came together to support legislation which ensures third- and fourth-year clerkship positions were not given to students from non-U.S. accredited medical schools, such as the one noted in the aforementioned article. The rationale for this decision by state lawmakers was to ensure that patient care met the national standards established by U.S. accrediting bodies for medical education and to ensure that there are enough clerkships for our Nevada medical students.

If the Caribbean third- and fourth-year students are not allowed to complete their clinical rotations here, they should not be allowed to take residency positions away from U.S.-trained medical professionals. The quality of patient care should be our foremost concern, and these Caribbean school medical graduates do not gain the same level of medical education and expertise as those trained in Nevada's medical schools.

Medical education is a huge investment in Nevada. While Touro does not receive tax dollars, the other two medical schools in our state do, for a combined investment of \$68 million. The state has also invested almost \$20 million in state tax dollars since 2014 to create residency positions. The reason for this investment in graduate medical education (residencies) is to help solve the problem of a serious physician shortage in our state.

We know that 70 percent of doctors end up practicing where they do their residencies. Nevada has one of the lowest number of residency programs in the United States. Nevada is spending millions of dollars of taxpayer money educating future doctors. The final step is residency programs. Why would we allow foreign medical schools to access our residency programs when we need them for Nevada medical students?

We are being incredibly shortsighted as a state if we allow Caribbean students to take residency slots away from Nevadans who wish to stay in their home state and practice. Touro had 39 graduates out of 137 place in Nevada residencies this year. UNR graduated 63 with only 21 percent staying in Nevada for residency. That means almost 150 Nevada medical school graduates have to leave the state for a residency program. Seventy percent will not return.



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There is absolutely no reason why Nevada residency positions should be filled with Caribbean school graduates especially given the lack of U.S. accreditation of their programs when they could be filled with Nevada medical graduates.

Our state legislators should extend the 2015 legislation to protect patient care by requiring that residency programs in our state be filled with graduates of U.S. accredited medical schools. Those same residency programs should be strongly

encouraged to fill their spots with high-quality Nevada medical school graduates. These measures would ensure quality patient care and increase the number of physicians in our state.

*— Shelley Berkley is CEO and senior provost of Touro University Nevada and a former congresswoman.*