

## MONEY~

### 2 hospitals cut family practice training

#### Facilities cite funding woes as a reason for ending programs

[6 comments](#) by **Ken Alltucker** - Dec. 26, 2008 03:55 PM  
The Arizona Republic

Two Phoenix-area hospital systems will end their training programs for family-practice physicians, cutting off a path for young doctors who want to learn and practice family [medicine](#) in Arizona.

Both John C. Lincoln Health Network and Mayo Clinic cited the struggle to pay for the programs because government funds are tight and fewer young doctors are choosing family medicine.

"The programs are an expensive thing to maintain," said Dr. Joseph Sirven, chair of education for Mayo Clinic Arizona. "We feel we have to phase it out. We agonized over this decision.

Health-policy experts stress the need for family doctors because they help patients manage their health and stave off troublesome and costly medical conditions. And unlike some specialists, they are more likely to work in rural communities.

Combined, the two hospitals' resident programs train eight family-practice resident doctors each year.

With those positions eliminated, there will be about three dozen family-practice residents remaining at Arizona hospitals such as Banner Good Samaritan Medical Center, St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center and [University Medical Center](#) in Tucson.

Arizona hospitals train hundreds of residents each year with medical specialties ranging from emergency medicine to dermatology and neurology.

These training programs allow young doctors fresh out of medical school to learn their craft and train under the supervision of veteran physicians.

The training slots also provide young doctors an important gateway to a community. Doctors are more likely to launch their careers near where they complete their medical training.

"It is clear that your resident training slots are a major (source) of how many physicians stay in your area," said Dr. Doug Campos-Outcalt, a University of Arizona College of Medicine-[Phoenix](#) faculty member and past president of the Arizona Academy of Family Physicians.

But the prospect of a career in family medicine is becoming a less appealing option for medical students because it typically pays far less than what a surgeon or dermatologist can pocket.

"If you are a medical student, it's kind of a no-brainer," said Dr. Susan Wilder, president of the Arizona Academy of Family Physicians. "We have an imbalanced system that doesn't support prevention and primary care but disproportionately rewards specialists."

John C. Lincoln CEO Dan Coleman said the cost of operating the family medicine training slots has increased while reimbursement from the federal government has not kept pace. He estimates that the hospital group will lose \$650,000 on the family-practice positions this year.

Also, the hospital group has been able to recruit private-practice doctors for its outpatient clinics, so it did not need to train residents to staff its own clinics.

Sirven said Mayo Clinic also faced similar financial pressure for its family-practice residents. It can cost \$100,000 or more to train each resident physician, but the federal government pays for a fraction of that amount, Sirven said.

"This speaks to the larger question of how do we fund medical education in the United States?" Sirven said. "These programs are an expensive thing to maintain."