

From the University of Mississippi Medical Center Division of Public Affairs

Keeton Accepts Appointment As New Vice Chancellor at UMMC

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JACKSON, Miss. – The University of Mississippi Medical Center today doesn't resemble the sleepy place Dr. Jimmy Keeton first saw as a medical student in 1961.

Now he's the helmsman of the same but very different Medical Center, one with a \$1.2 billion budget that makes up 10 percent of the economy of Jackson and two percent of the state's economy.

He was appointed vice chancellor for health affairs and dean of the school of medicine on Feb. 9, after a six-month search.

It was not a job he sought, but it's one that fits him like an old shoe. He is a passionate cheerleader for the Medical Center and about its role in Mississippi's future.

Two candidates were finalists in the national search for vice chancellor, but both – Dr. Scott Stringer, chairman of the Department of Otolaryngology and Communicative Sciences, and Dr. Robert Robbins, chief of cardiovascular surgery at Stanford University – withdrew their names from consideration.

University of Mississippi Chancellor Dr. Dan Jones, in a message to Medical Center employees, said extending the search was not a good option.

"The instability of the economy and health care was a major factor in our decision to move forward."

Keeton was interim vice chancellor after having served as chief-of-staff for Jones when he was UMMC vice chancellor.

"I am grateful to Dr. Keeton for making himself available for leadership of the Medical Center. His wisdom, keen judgment and superlative communication skills have benefited us all over these last seven months. He has gained the confidence of the Medical Center family and important external stakeholders."

In other leadership changes, Dr. LouAnn Woodward, who was serving as interim dean of the medical school, is now associate vice chancellor for health affairs as well as vice dean of the school. Stringer, also associate vice chancellor for clinical affairs, will assume additional administrative oversight for the clinical enterprise, including the University Hospitals and Health System and University Physicians.

"It will be a pleasure to work alongside Dr. Woodward as we move forward," Keeton said, "and Dr. Stringer's new role is crucial in streamlining the clinical services and creating an integrated system between physicians and the hospital system."

Keeton, a native of Columbus, attended the first public elementary school in Mississippi and the S.D. Lee High School in Columbus. He's an Ole Miss graduate and earned the M.D. here in 1965. He did a rotating internship and completed residencies in general surgery and urology here. He trained further in pediatric urology at the Hospital for Sick

Children in London and was a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Naval Hospital in Great Lakes, Ill.

Back in Jackson, he was on the surgery faculty from 1973-75 and was in private practice in Jackson for 27 years. He returned to the full-time faculty in 2000 and was named Jones' chief of staff in 2007. He's been interim vice chancellor for nearly a year.

"I've had experience in all kinds of health-care delivery systems – at the VA, in the Navy, in community hospitals, in private practice and in this teaching institution," Keeton said. "I think that experience gives me a certain advantage in working toward our role in ending health disparities in the state.

"That's our fourth mission – beyond the traditional ones of education, research, and patient care – but we have to know how to work with other systems that also are committed to better health care. We're already in partnership with the Mississippi Department of Health, the Federally Qualified Health Centers, the Delta Health Alliance and hospitals in Tupelo, Pascagoula, Meridian and Hattiesburg.

"We can't wait for the federal government to do it for us. We have to do it ourselves." This Medical Center, he believes, belongs to all of Mississippi. "We're for everybody, not just the people in Jackson." He wants people to understand "what a special place" this is. "It's true that we're the safety-net hospital for the state, but we should also be viewed as a target industry. The 2,500 physicians in the state we've already trained have a \$3.5 billion economic impact on the state. And the \$170 million we get from state appropriations all goes to our educational programs."

Education is the Medical Center's number one responsibility, he said.

"When we face budget restrictions from the legislature, we just have to find other ways to make up the difference. We can't compromise the quality of the programs we offer."

The still-youthful Keeton, who was planning to retire at 62, then at 65, then at 70, keeps being called back into service. "I will stay here as long as I'm needed." He adds that he has the genes to persevere. "My father was healthy until he died in his sleep at 94."

In some ways his job as vice chancellor may be easier than his job as interim. "When I was interim, I didn't have a Jimmy Keeton." As permanent head of the institution, he will have both Dr. Mart McMullan and Dr. Claude Brunson acting in the roles of chief-of-staff.

"I'm excited about this job and at peace because we have a great leadership team in place. Everything will be fine."

But the leadership is just part of the equation, according to Keeton.

"Every one of our 8,500 employees is doing something important for Mississippi, and I want them to know this office appreciates what they do every day."

His wife, Jona, a nurse and family therapist, "has been incredibly supportive" of all his decisions, even this one, which postpones his retirement once again.

"She shares my passion for the Medical Center and knows how important it is to Mississippi."

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The University of Mississippi Medical Center, located in Jackson, is the state's only academic medical center. University of Mississippi Health Care represents the clinical programs of the Medical Center and includes University Hospitals and Health System and University Physicians, the faculty group practice. UMMC encompasses five health science schools, including medicine, nursing, health related professions, dentistry and graduate studies, as well as the site where University of Mississippi pharmacy students do their clinical training. The Medical Center's threefold mission is to educate tomorrow's health-care professionals, conduct innovative research to improve human health, and to provide the highest quality care available to the state's citizens. A major goal of the Medical Center is the improvement of the health of Mississippians and the elimination of health disparities. For more information, contact the Division of Public Affairs at 601-984-1100 or visit us on the Web at <http://info.umc.edu/>.