

From the University of Mississippi Medical Center Division of Public Affairs

UMMC, HEALTH MANAGEMENT EXPLORE POSSIBLE AFFILIATION

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Editors: *Dr. Keeton will be available for comment 2-3 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 1.*

JACKSON, Miss. – The University of Mississippi Medical Center and Health Management Associates, Inc., which owns 10 hospitals in Mississippi, have announced that they are exploring a possible affiliation to expand health professions education in the state, enhance the delivery and quality of medical services, and prepare both organizations for a changing national health-care landscape in the years ahead.

Officials said today that the potential affiliation will pave the way for broad cooperation that will create more opportunities for community-based training of resident physicians and other trainees, offer a menu of health services in settings ranging from a rural community clinic to an urban academic medical center, and open additional venues for population-based health research to improve care and the health status of Mississippi residents.

“In this new era of health care, none of us can stand alone anymore,” said Dr. James E. Keeton, UMMC vice chancellor for health affairs and dean of the School of Medicine. “We have to collaborate to survive. This is not only in our interest but, more importantly, the interest of our students and patients. First and foremost, this collaboration will help us boost the number of physicians that are trained in Mississippi, in response to a shortage that will only grow worse over time. Doing that will ensure better and more accessible care for all our citizens.”

The affiliation between a public academic health science center and an investor-owned company is not unusual. Health Management, which owns 66 hospitals and 461 clinics in 15 states, has relationships with other academic centers both public and private.

In the Jackson metro area, Health Management facilities include River Oaks Hospital and Woman’s Hospital at River Oaks, both in Flowood, Crossgates River Oaks Hospital in Brandon, Madison River Oaks Hospital in Canton and Central Mississippi Medical Center. The company also owns hospitals in Amory, Batesville, Biloxi, Clarksdale and Natchez.

Sweeping changes in financing and government regulation of health care, aimed at improving patient outcomes while restraining costs, are causing many providers to look for innovative ways to operate more efficiently and effectively. Managing care across a larger organization – even a virtual one – can yield economies of scale and operational synergies.

In one option being explored, UMMC will work with Health Management to create educational opportunities for medical residents and fellows – physicians who are pursuing specialty training following medical school – in its Mississippi hospitals. Doing so would enhance UMMC’s ability to grow the number of physicians in Mississippi, which lags behind nearly every other state in its per-capita supply and distribution of doctors.

Both parties believe the venture will expand access to health care and lead to marked improvements in statewide services for childhood illnesses, cancer, stroke, chest pain and cardiovascular disease.

Keeton stressed that this affiliation, one of several UMMC has with health-care providers, will not affect UMMC's relationships with other health systems in the state, either as education sites or in collaborating on patient care.

"We've always been willing to work with anyone and that will continue to be true no matter what happens," he said.

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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://publicaffairs.umc.edu/>