

2007 Progress Report of the Virginia Generalist Initiative Program

In recognition of a downward trend nationwide in the production of generalist physicians, the General Assembly, in collaboration with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, began funding the Virginia Generalist Initiative program (VGI) in 1994. The purpose of the program is to enhance generalist physician education in the Commonwealth and to increase the number of medical school graduates entering generalist medical fields at the Eastern Virginia Medical School (EVMS), the University of Virginia (UVA), and the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). Since the program's inception in 1994, the General Assembly has provided over \$33.3 million from the general fund for the VGI program, or approximately \$2.4 million per year on average.

When the program was established, the Commonwealth set two specific goals for VGI and funding was contingent upon school performance.

- a. At least 50 percent of Virginia medical school graduates shall enter generalist residency programs; and
- b. At least 50 percent of Virginia generalist residency graduates shall enter generalist practice upon completion of residency training and at least 50 percent of those graduates shall practice in Virginia.

Since 1996, the program has produced about 1,600 generalist physicians and over 900 of them practice generalist medicine in Virginia upon graduation. The VGI program has thus been successful, particularly in retention of graduates practicing generalist medicine in Virginia. Besides meeting the statistical goals set forth by the General Assembly, the VGI program has fundamentally changed the pedagogy of medical education at the three medical schools. The curricula constructed under the VGI program has become part of the core learning objectives for all medical students regardless of the careers they eventually choose. In addition, all students are provided with clinical experience throughout the entire training period.

Between 1995 and 2003, the three medical schools provided annual reports to the General Assembly to demonstrate their achievements in meeting the state goals. In 2003, the General Assembly changed the measure of success from using the reporting year data to three-year averages so as to smooth the fluctuation in the annual production, and changed the progress reporting from annual to biennial.

Student choices are largely influenced by national trends and the supply and demand in the health care market. Fluctuations in marketplace changes make it difficult to predict student demands. At the request of the three medical schools, the General Assembly changed the requirements of the VGI program in the 2006 Appropriation Act. There are no longer specific state goals to meet and VGI program funding is folded into the institutions' operating appropriations. Instead, the three medical schools are

required to educate and train sufficient generalist physicians to meet the needs of the Commonwealth, and to support medical education for all undergraduate medical students, regardless of their chosen specialty or field of study.

In addition, the General Assembly directs the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) to “monitor the results of the Generalist Initiative, especially the decisions of the graduates from the undergraduate medical programs to enter generalist residencies, and the composition of the residencies in the two associated academic health centers” (Item 145.F, Chapter 847). It further directs SCHEV to work with institutions to set reporting requirements that allow for flexibility and the recognition of the national trends as part of the program review, and make a biennial progress report to the General Assembly by November 1, which shall include policy and funding recommendations, as appropriate, to address the need for medical education and training in the Commonwealth.

Based on the revised requirements to the VGI program, SCHEV decided to continue the program report format for the 2007 biennial report. The rationale is the current report format demonstrates the level of achievement that the VGI program attains and provides benchmarks for policy decisions. EVMS, UVA and VCU submitted their program reports to SCHEV in October. The following is the VGI program progress report.

Table 1 shows the 3-year average of undergraduate medical school students entering generalist residencies between 2005 and 2007. The statewide average percent of total graduates entering generalist residencies has increased over the 2003-2005 performance level (45% versus 43%).

Table 1
3-Year (2005-2007) Average of
Medical School Graduates Entering Generalist Medicine Residencies

Medical School	Number of Graduates	Number of Graduates Entering Generalist Residencies	Percent of Graduates Entering Generalist Residencies
EVMS	100	48	48%
UVA	131	60	46%
VCU	171	75	44%
Total	402	182	45%

Medical students’ career choices are influenced by a variety of factors including the health care market supply and demand, managed care requirements and cost concerns. Fluctuations in marketplace changes make it difficult to predict student demands. It is more constructive to compare Virginia’s performance with national trends and factors related to the supply and demand of the health care market. Table 2 shows that the student choice for the generalist program at Virginia medical schools has mirrored the national trends. But Virginia medical schools have outperformed the national average on this issue over the years.

Table 2
Student Residency Choice for the Generalist Program

Year of Graduation	Percent of graduates entering generalist residency program at Virginia medical schools	Percent of graduates entering generalist residency program nationwide
1995	49%	47%
1996	51%	51%
1997	59%	52%
1998	55%	52%
1999	56%	50%
2000	51%	48%
2001	50%	46%
2002	48%	42%
2003	43%	40%
2004	43%	41%
2005	44%	41%
2006	48%	40%
2007	41%	40%
2005-07 Average	44%	40%

Table 3 shows the percent of residency graduates practicing generalist medicine and Table 4 shows the percent of residency graduates practicing generalist medicine in Virginia.

Table 3
3-Year (2005-2007) Average of
Generalist Residency Graduates Entering Generalist Practice

Medical School	Total Residency Graduates	Number of Residency Graduates Choosing Generalist Practice	Percent of Residency Graduates Entering Generalist Practice
EVMS	40	22	55%
UVA	73	37	50%
VCU	73	40	55%
Total	186	99	53%

Table 4
3-Year (2005-2007) Average of
Generalist Residency Graduates Entering Generalist Practice in Virginia

Medical School	Number of Residency Graduates Choosing Generalist Practice	Number of Residency Graduates Entering Generalist Practice In Virginia	Percent of Residency Graduates Entering Generalist Practice In Virginia
EVMS	22	12	55%
UVA	37	22	60%
VCU	40	28	70%
Total	99	62	63%

Table 3 shows that more than half of the residency graduates from the three medical schools are practicing generalist medicine. Table 4 reveals that of those

residency graduates practicing generalist medicine, nearly two-thirds practice in Virginia. The outcome in Table 4 indicates the success of the VGI program and demonstrates the importance of the establishment of the VGI program.

In addition to the statistical achievements, the three institutions provided qualitative program evaluation in the areas of their graduates' responses to the annual Graduation Questionnaire administered by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), student evaluation of their programs, and faculty and community preceptors' evaluation of student learning and skills. All three medical schools reported that their graduates gave positive evaluations of the VGI program in the annual survey. Virginia students' ratings were higher than the national average to questions regarding how well the program provides the introductory courses, sufficient clinical skill preparation, and adequate coverage of subjects such as community health, geriatrics, health care systems, and professionalism. Students also gave high remarks for their community-based educational experiences for enhanced clinical skills. In addition, all three schools actively and regularly seek community preceptors' feedback regarding the student's medical knowledge, clinical skills and professional attitudes and behaviors. Overall, faculty and community preceptors have given good evaluations of the students' quality. The community-based experiences help students in their decision to serve medically underserved areas -- a major concern and goal of the Commonwealth. In sum, the VGI program has enhanced the quality of the medical education by producing competent and caring physicians.

All three medical schools reported that recruitment focus had been placed on identifying and tracking applicants who have potential to become generalist physicians, especially from rural or medically underserved areas of Virginia. Research was also conducted to identify and recruit students who would choose generalist careers upon graduation, particularly those interested in serving rural and medically underserved communities. However, institutions reported that despite efforts to recruit students from rural Virginia areas, small applicant pools from rural areas persist.

Overall, in the past two years, the VGI program has continued to be successful in recruiting and training students for generalist medicine, and producing graduates who practice generalist medicine in Virginia. In addition, the program has provided support to medical education and training in the principles of generalist medicine for all undergraduate medical students regardless of their chose specialty or field of study.