

Rethinking medical school

Hofstra North Shore-LIJ develops innovative curriculum

By **SCOTT BRINTON**
 sbrinton@liherald.com

Seated in his expansive, brightly lit office on the Hofstra North Shore-LIJ School of Medicine's second floor, Dr. Lawrence Smith, the school's founding dean, appears at home, a smile etched across his face as he speaks of the school's role in transforming medical education.

For Smith, the four-year school is a chance to rethink how medicine is taught from the bottom up. The school, which was founded in 2008 and welcomed its first class in 2011, was built in response to a 2006 Association of American Medical Colleges' report that warned there weren't enough medical schools to keep pace with the rapidly growing demand for new doctors as the population ages.

The Jets' old training center on Hofstra's north campus was gutted to build the medical school. Where once there were weight rooms, now there are classrooms, including a state-of-the-art laboratory.

In May, Hofstra and North Shore-LIJ officials announced plans to double the school's footprint, from 50,000 to 115,000 square feet, at a cost of \$39.5 million. "It's a tremendous feeling to stand here and proclaim that we need more room to fully carry out our mission," Smith said at the time.

While the medical school is cutting-edge, its heart is its student-centered curriculum, said Smith. Students, he said, play a critical role in determining their course of study, and blocks of their days are devoted to independent learning.

Hofstra students will come away with a thorough knowledge of the art, craft and science of 21st century medical care, said Smith. Foremost, though, they must understand the humanity behind medicine.

Medicine, Smith said, "is all about the patients. If it's all about you, you'll always be unhappy."

Medical students, he said, must "be willing to do whatever it takes to become excellent."

An integrated curriculum

Dr. Keith Metzger, 38, an associate professor in the Science Department, was among the Hofstra medical school's first full-time faculty members. There are now 40 at the school's medical education building on the Hofstra campus, with another 1,550 at North Shore-LIJ Health System clinics and hospitals.

Metzger earned his doctorate in anatomical sciences from SUNY Stony Brook, with a focus on medical education. "Teaching was really more of my passion," he said.

Metzger was attracted to teaching at Hofstra because it presented a rare opportunity to create a school's curriculum from scratch. Hofstra officials scoured the country, looking at



Courtesy Hofstra North Shore-LIJ School of Medicine

DR. KEITH METZGER, far right, one of Hofstra North Shore-LIJ School of Medicine's first professors, teaches anatomy. Here he was pictured with a class in the school's state-of-the-art laboratory.

leading medical schools' best teaching practices, adopting what worked and abandoning what did not. What evolved, Metzger said, was an "integrated curriculum" that crossed disciplines. For their basic science studies, students do not learn anatomy (the study of the human body), physiology (the study of human systems, such as the circulatory system) and pathology (the study and diagnosis of disease) independently of one another. Rather, they study them together, enabling them to draw connections between the body, its systems and disease.

At Hofstra, every student is certified as an emergency medical technician and must do a rotation aboard a North Shore-LIJ ambulance, Metzger said. The experience, he said, gives many students their first taste of field medicine and prepares them to perform in a high-pressure environment.

Hofstra students start to see patients in North Shore-LIJ clinics and hospitals in their third year. North Shore-LIJ, among the nation's top-rated health systems, allows Hofstra students to study and work with many of the country's best doctors, Metzger said.

"There is no other curriculum that is like ours," he said.

What the students say

Kevin Smith, 25, of Carle Place, recently finished his first year at Hofstra's medical school. Before enrolling at Hofstra, he earned his bachelor's from the University of Pennsylvania, completed a master's in physiology at Georgetown and conducted prostate cancer research at the prestigious Feinstein Institute in Manhasset, the research arm of the North Shore-LIJ Health System.

Smith, who said he decided to become a doctor in ninth grade, learned about Hofstra's medical school through the Feinstein Institute. "I was really interested in the curriculum and the adult learning" at Hofstra, he said, adding that class sizes are small and students are given a voice in developing the curriculum.

Daina Blitz, 24, who grew up in Rockville Centre and now makes her home in Long Beach, is a third-year Hofstra medical student. She received her bachelor's from Boston University, where she certified as an EMT and served on the univer-

sity's emergency medical services unit.

The chance to be in the Hofstra medical school's first class appealed to her: "I wanted to be a pioneer," she said. "I wanted to be in the first class. There are a lot of ups and downs ... It gets better as we go. That's what I expected."

Emily Sellinger, 22, who was raised in Mineola and now lives in Westbury, recently completed her first year at Hofstra. Sellinger, who earned her bachelors' from Queens College, likes the Hofstra medical school's intimate feel. "You make a lot of good friends when you're in a class of 40," she said.

To unwind, many students go out together for meals, Sellinger said. "We have other lives outside of medical school — sometimes," she joked.

"The hours are long," Sellinger added, "but it's up to you how much time you put into it." Students, she said, study nine to 15 hours a day, with all-night study sessions common during final exams.

"It's challenging," Blitz said, "but it's not impossible. You do have to have a lot of self-discipline."

Medical students must "be willing to do whatever it takes to become excellent."

DR. LAWRENCE SMITH
 Founding dean, Hofstra North Shore-LIJ School of Medicine

Med school's biggest challenge

Dr. Smith said the greatest challenge that students may face isn't getting through medical school, but repaying student loans afterward. Many students must take tens of thousands of dollars of debt to finance medical school. Smith is acutely aware of the financial burden that they must bear, and so he continually seeks endowment contributions from university benefactors to award more scholarships and reduce the cost of a Hofstra medical education.

Kevin Smith, who is considering a career in pediatric critical care, said he has taken student loans to pay for medical school. "It's a very large burden," he said. "If I think about it too much, it freaks me out."

Smith, though, said he tries not to think about the cost of his medical education, knowing that it will enable him to fulfill a longtime dream.

"I want to take care of very sick people," he said. With the help of the Hofstra North Shore-LIJ Medical School, he's on his way.



Scott Brinton/Herald

DAINA BLITZ, from left, Kevin Smith and Emily Sellinger are three of the Hofstra medical school's early students. The school was founded in 2008 and opened its doors in 2011. Blitz is a member of its first class.