Medical school will spur growth

By JOHN P. SHERIDAN JR.
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Nearly 30 years after Gov. Brendan Byrne first signed legislation to create a four-year medical school in Camden, Gov. Jon Corzine has brought that dream to life, with the signing of his Executive Reorganization Plan. The governor has provided the opportunity for enhanced higher education, superior medical care and, increased economic development in the city of Camden and South Jersey.

Upon the accreditation of a four-year allopathic medical school, which will be part of Rowan University, Cooper will be a university hospital in every sense of that term, and Rowan University will join the ranks of only 130 universities in the country that have a medical school. This is truly a win-win for Rowan and Cooper.

The governor's plan allows these two dynamic institutions to address the shortage of physicians in the state, and to provide additional opportunities for our residents to receive a medical education. It will foster creativity, innovation and cost-efficiency in health care delivery. It will spawn related educational programs at Rowan University in the allied health professions. It will strengthen the growing biomedical industry sector, which will bring high-paying jobs in medicine and biomedical research. Coriell Institute, which is located on the Cooper health care campus, figures to play a major part in this equation with its ground-breaking work in genetics and personalized medicine.

Rebirth

This venture will serve as an economic catalyst for the city of Camden. To imagine the possibilities and what this can mean to Camden, one need only to drive up the turnpike to New Brunswick. That city's amazing rebirth can be traced to a significant degree to the expansion of Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and Robert Wood Johnson Hospital over the past 20 years.

With that growth came thousands of health care and research jobs and many start-up businesses to serve those institutions, their employees, and patients. With it also came commercial development and market rate housing. New Brunswick's other mainstays are Johnson and Johnson, Rutgers University and county government. Camden has very similar anchor institutions, including Campbell Soup Co., Rowan University, Rutgers University, Coriell Institute and Camden County College all centered on its downtown. Camden is well positioned for a great future.

Cooper Medical School of Rowan University will be part of a $600 million expansion of the health sciences campus in Camden. Last December, Cooper completed the largest single construction project in the city in more than 30 years with its 10-story Patient Pavilion. The Department of Veterans Affairs just recently opened a community based outpatient clinic at Broadway and Stevens Street. We will break ground later this year for a $75 million Cooper Cancer Institute. The addition of the new 160,000-square-foot medical school building will increase that footprint and help revitalize downtown Camden.

For consumers, the new medical school will mean that the South Jersey residents, who now seek medical care across the river in Philadelphia, will have more reason than ever to stay in New Jersey for their health-care needs. That could keep more than $1 billion a year in health-care spending right here in South Jersey.
Thanks to Corzine’s leadership, this long-held dream of a four year allopathic medical school in Camden will soon become a reality for all of us.

The writer is president and CEO of Cooper University Hospital.