



WISCONSIN POLICY FORUM

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50 years after blue ribbon commission, report provides “checkup” on the Medical College of Wisconsin

MILWAUKEE—Fifty years after civic leaders issued an urgent call to preserve a medical school in southeast Wisconsin, a new report by the Wisconsin Policy Forum finds that the vision put forward by those leaders has been largely fulfilled. The report also notes, however, that the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW) today “faces unique challenges that were not evident in the late 1960s,” including a challenging financial paradigm and “stubborn disparities in health care among area residents.”

The analysis – “Examining the Vital Signs: A 50-Year Checkup of the Medical College of Wisconsin” – was initiated last year upon the 50th anniversary of the publication of a report by the Greater Milwaukee Committee’s Heil Commission. The Commission was formed after Marquette University signaled its intent to terminate its relationship with its medical school.

Citing the need to ensure a sufficient supply of health care professionals, provide access to complex care, and grow scientific research and development in the region, the Commission urged metro Milwaukee leaders to take all necessary steps to maintain a “first-rate” medical school in the region as part of a larger regional medical center.

The Forum report explores the extent to which today’s MCW – which functions as part of the larger Milwaukee Regional Medical Center (MRMC) – has met the Commission’s aspirations and whether the community is enjoying the benefits that were promised at the time. Key findings include:

- **MCW is a vital link in the physician pipeline.** MCW graduates over half of all medical students trained in Wisconsin each year. In addition to those 200 graduates, MCW provides training for approximately 950 residents and fellows and continuing education

for 25,000 physician participants annually. MCW recently opened two new campuses in central and northeast Wisconsin, which are supported by new residencies and fellowships in hard-to-fill specialties.

- **MCW physician specialists provide complex medical care that would not otherwise exist in southeast Wisconsin.** Staffed largely by MCW physician specialists, Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin, Froedtert Hospital, and the VA Medical Center offer cutting-edge medical care for complex conditions in facilities that are rated among the best in the country. This level of care rarely is found in a metropolitan area the size of Milwaukee.
- **MCW is southeast Wisconsin’s preeminent leader in medical and scientific research.** MCW’s annual research expenditures of approximately \$200 million are roughly double the total of all other academic institutions in southeast Wisconsin combined. MCW’s research helps to advance medical and scientific knowledge and improve clinical care, and its status as a top research institution is instrumental in attracting high-quality talent to work at MCW and its teaching hospitals.

Yet, despite concluding that MCW and its partners at the MRMC have met (and in many cases exceeded) the expectations of the Heil Commission, the report also points to new challenges. Among them are heightened financial pressures that may impact MCW’s research prowess.

“Sustaining MCW’s research operation at current levels will be difficult, but the stakes are high,” says the report. “(An inability to do so) not only will affect research output and quality, but also will impact the institution’s ability to attract the renowned faculty who provide quality education and complex care.”

The report also suggests that MCW needs to intensify and broaden its community engagement efforts.

“Interviews with local health care leaders and with MCW’s own leadership indicate that to some extent, MCW is not as tapped into the health care needs of the region’s population as it could be. Efforts to strengthen research in population health and to work with community leaders in addressing the overall health of Milwaukee residents could pay mutual dividends, as could efforts to enhance the flow of central city students into the physician pipeline.”

The full report can be downloaded at www.publicpolicyforum.org.

The Wisconsin Policy Forum was created on January 1, 2018 by the merger of the Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum and the Madison-based Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance. Throughout their lengthy histories, both organizations engaged in nonpartisan, independent research and civic education on fiscal and policy issues affecting state and local governments and school districts in Wisconsin. WPF is committed to those same activities and that same spirit of nonpartisanship.