

# Clinic considers dental school

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## Medical center's college would be just second in Wisconsin

The Marshfield Clinic wants to build the state's second dental school to meet a growing shortage of dentists in rural and underserved areas.

The Clinic is conducting a feasibility study to determine whether it's possible, and necessary, to open a dental school in Marshfield, said Joseph Kilsdonk, administrator for the Division of Education at Marshfield Clinic. He expects to complete the

study in several months.

The Clinic's coverage stretches across much of the state's dental health professional shortage areas, including Clark and Taylor counties and part of Marathon County, according to the Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association.

"It has to meet the mission we're going on. It's a dental school that goes after rural and underserved patients," Kilsdonk

said. "And secondly, is it sustainable?"

The Clinic's dental centers have seen patients from all but five of Wisconsin's 72 counties, and the need isn't slowing, said Greg Nycz, director of the Family Health Center of Marshfield and health policy for the Clinic. It has centers in Ladysmith, Park Falls, Owen and Chippewa Falls. Clinics in Medford and Neillsville are planned to open later this year.

Marquette University has the only dental school in Wisconsin, and there are regularly more applicants than openings.

For the first two years, students will study and train at the proposed school before moving into the rural centers for their third and fourth years, Nycz said. "We want to put the school where the need is," he said.

The school will have 50 students per class, and Nycz wants to have 12 clin-

ics available for training.

"What I can tell you is based on many years of primary care education — it makes a huge difference," said Anne Dopp, primary care officer for the Department of Health. "Even the kind of students recruited into the school makes a difference in where they work."

There are financial incentives for students to work in rural areas, Dopp said. Federal programs offer tax

free loan reimbursement up to \$120,000 for students who practice in a shortage area, treat patients on Medicaid and have a sliding pay scale for the uninsured, Dopp said.

Participation is low. Only three Wisconsin dentists are enrolled in the federal program, she said. Eight dentists are part of the state reimbursement program.

Nycz said it will cost about \$20 million to \$25 million to build the school,

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# Dental: Arizona program a model

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purchase equipment and develop its infrastructure — including an auditorium, classrooms and lab.

If the feasibility study shows a need for the school, construction could begin as early as 2010, with students enrolled by 2011, Nycz said.

"It is doable, and we're trying to build a dental school a lot more reasonably from a donor or taxpayer's perspective," he said.

Nycz wants to complete the feasibility study as quickly as possible, so the Clinic can apply for federal stimulus money. As much as \$10 million is available, he said, but private funding also will be needed.

Kilsdonk has made several trips to the Arizona School of Dentistry and Oral Health in Mesa, Ariz., to observe its infrastructure and curriculum. The school aims to develop dentists who will work in regions and communities that need access to dental care.

The school opened in 2003 based on trends its creators saw in dental care shortages in Arizona.

Nycz said the Clinic would model its school off Arizona's program, hiring a core of teachers and then bringing in others for specialty training.

"We want to see if that system would work here to keep cost down," he said, "and have high-quality staff."