

History

East Tennessee State University's Quillen College of Medicine is the only medical school in the Tennessee Board of Regents System and, with the College of Nursing, College of Clinical and Rehabilitative Health Sciences, Gatton College of Pharmacy, and College of Public Health, serves as the system's health sciences center.

In just three decades, the College has developed into one of the nation's leading schools for rural medicine and primary care training, an honor consistently recognized by *U.S. News & World Report*.

Securing legislative approval of the school did not come without challenge, without controversy, or without a fight. In fact, the battle to bring a medical school to East Tennessee is regarded by some as one of the most dramatic chapters in the history of Tennessee politics.

It was in the late 1960s, on the ETSU campus, when one of the first meetings was held to discuss the idea of establishing a medical school here. In the fall of 1961 Burgin E. Dossett, President of East Tennessee State College, began subtle lobbying for a medical school. The drive for a medical school gained additional momentum in 1963 when East Tennessee State College became a university. Three years later in March 1966, the first public announcement was made revealing the plans for obtaining a medical school for Northeast East Tennessee.

In 1968, Dr. D.P. Culp was appointed president of ETSU, and his stated major goal was to establish a medical school. Understanding that the help of Congressman Jimmy Quillen would be vital if the dream for a medical school were to be realized, Dr. Culp and numerous others solicited and secured his support. Joining Congressman Quillen in the fight for the ETSU medical school were State Representative P.L. Robinson, ETSU Dean of Health John Lamb, Johnson City attorney Mark Hicks, then Speaker of the House Ned McWherter, newspaper publisher Carl Jones, State Senator Marshall Nave, State Representative Gwen Fleming, ETSU President D.P. Culp, Johnson City Physician Dr. Charles Ed Allen, and State Representative Bob Good.

A 1971 study by THEC concluded that it was not cost effective to have a medical school in Northeast East Tennessee. This study was supported by the Board of Regents. Soon after this disappointment, a new avenue for the Tri Cities contingent opened.

Officials hoped to win approval for the College of Medicine through new federal legislation that was being introduced. In April 1971, U.S. Congressman Olin Teague of Texas introduced a bill to create five medical schools in conjunction with established VA hospitals or affiliated with medical colleges. Senator Alan Cranston of California introduced a companion bill. Known as the Teague-Cranston Act, the proposal called for the creation of five new medical schools in five states to meet the needs of the medically underserved areas of the country. Congressman Quillen introduced a crucial amendment to the Teague Bill, one requiring that any university to be considered for acceptance into this pilot program must be on government property contiguous and adjacent to a VA hospital. The bill passed both houses without a dissenting vote in October of 1972. President Nixon signed the Teague-Cranston Act on October 24, 1972 at 12:30 p.m.

In Tennessee, Senator Nave called for consideration of the medical school legislation in the Upper House on February 14, 1974 and the Upper House approved it. Four days later, the bill failed to get a majority vote in the Lower House. Representatives Robinson and Good called in their political chips, and on February 28, the measure was passed. The bill was presented to Governor Dunn, and as expected, he vetoed it. Senator Nave and Representative Robinson immediately made motions in their respective houses to override the Governor's veto. Once again, both sides called in favors and made promises of future support in an effort to sway the necessary votes their way.

The Senate overrode with a comfortable 18-13 vote on March 6, and the House needed only to follow suit to enact the law that would make a free-standing medical school at ETSU a reality. Representative Robinson needed to collect at least 50 votes to supersede Governor Dunn's veto. On March 12, 1974 the state Legislature overrode the Governor's veto by a vote of 51-37, with the decisive vote being cast by Speaker of the House Ned McWherter.

Victory for the region, higher education, and improved health care had been achieved.

On August 21, 1978, the first class of 24 students arrived on campus.

Four years later, in May of 1982, those 24 students walked across the stage to be hooded as M.D.s and graduate from the College of Medicine. In attendance as commencement speaker was The Honorable Ned McWherter, now Governor of Tennessee.

Founded in 1974 on a mission to train primary care physicians and to increase the number of doctors in rural communities, the Quillen College of Medicine, with more than 1,500 graduates, has remained true to its original mission. Thirty-five years later, Fitzhugh Mullan published his innovative "social mission" research in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, demonstrating that Quillen is ranked first in the nation for primary care graduates.

Approximately 65 percent of our students and 51 percent of our residency graduates are practicing in primary care.

And, 22 percent are serving in rural, traditionally underserved, areas. That's more than double the national average.

Many students tell us they chose the Quillen College of Medicine because of its small class size. Only 60 students are admitted each year, which is less than half the size of some medical school classes. Most of our students come from Tennessee, and they tend to stay close to home when they graduate, with more than half of our medical school and residency graduates now practicing in the Volunteer State. Our current students range in age from 21 to 53. And even though the number of men in medical school is higher than women across the nation, here at the Quillen College of Medicine, we actually have more women enrolled.

Research is at the core of our mission. We've been fortunate to recruit several nationally and internationally known scientists in the areas of cardiovascular disease, oncology, neuro-cardiology, infectious diseases, and primary care.

The presence of the Quillen College of Medicine has led to dramatic changes and advances in health care in the Tri-Cities Tennessee/Virginia. Our clinical practice, ETSU Physicians and Associates, offers more than 40 specialties and sub-specialties in medicine, surgery, women's health, pediatrics, and psychiatry. Many of those specialized services are not available anywhere else in the region.

As a major academic health center, our goal is to bring new discoveries in research immediately to the patient's bedside.

We hold affiliations and partnerships with some of the world's most prestigious research institutions, including St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and the Vanderbilt Ingram Cancer Center Network, and we have been designated as an HIV/AIDS Center of Excellence for Tennessee.

The changes and innovations effected by the James H. Quillen College of Medicine have encompassed so much more than just the health care professions. It is unlikely that the individuals who fought so hard to establish this college could have foreseen the level of growth and expansion of the Tri-Cities region that has taken place. While the original dream may have been achieved, the Quillen College of Medicine still promotes a vision for the Tri-Cities that will continue to lead and guide this region far into the future.