



HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL CENTER FOR PRIMARY CARE

Harvard Medical School will launch the Harvard Medical School Center for Primary Care, through which we believe we can make major strategic contributions to primary care education and research.

A CRISIS IN PRIMARY CARE

We share the view of many in the United States that the field of primary care in our country is in crisis. This sector of medical practice—defined by the Institute of Medicine as “the provision of integrated, accessible health care services by clinicians who are accountable for addressing a large majority of personal health care needs, developing a sustained partnership with patients, and practicing in the context of family and community”—receives less funding proportionally in the United States than in any other developed nation. Primary care providers are underpaid and overworked compared to most other medical specialties, and many are disillusioned. Few students go into primary care and many primary care physicians are opting out of the system through retirement or other career changes.

The primary care crisis was already acute, due to these low levels of investment in and growth of the primary care workforce—but the recent global financial perturbations have cast a new and even more stark light on these issues. Primary care is recognized internationally as central to healthcare; strong primary care is associated with better population health, improved patient outcomes, and lower-cost care. In the United States, however, healthcare is more expensive than in any other industrialized country and outcomes in quality and safety still need improvement. At any time, but particularly in the current economic situation, one of our most important strategies to reduce costs and improve quality must be to increase emphasis on and support of primary care.

There are signs that this emphasis on primary care is already on the upswing. Service payment reform may allow transformation of primary care practice. Promising efforts are underway to transform the way that primary care will be delivered—for example, through patient-centered medical homes. But we must be vigilant in order to allow these efforts, and others, to gain ground. As some have recently pointed out, even the best “medical home” will require a solid

and responsive “medical neighborhood,” a broader system of hospitals and other provider organizations equally committed to integration and reform.¹

HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL’S COMMITMENT

This creation of a new “medical neighborhood”—finding new ways to think about organizing care systemically and training physician-leaders for new ways of practice—could arguably be Harvard Medical School’s greatest strength in this arena.

To be clear: we believe that we certainly can, by clarifying and highlighting the interest of HMS in the field of primary care, augment and extend the primary care workforce and enhance the capacity of those who enter this field to innovate and lead. We can do this both locally, through our direct education and mentoring of Harvard Medical School students, and more broadly, through our example and the influence we have in the medical community.

But this will not be our most important contribution to this national challenge.

There are many exceptionally successful efforts in the area of primary care at medical schools in the United States. Our goal is *to use the unique strengths that make us the leading medical school in the world, and the extraordinary talent that we do already have in this area, to address fundamental questions and challenges in primary care and, by extension, in the organization of medical care more broadly.*

For these reasons, we are committed to launching the Harvard Medical School Center for Primary Care—a center that occupies both physical and virtual space readily accessible to our medical students and faculty—as a lead focal point nationally for primary care education, research, and clinical innovation.

HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL CENTER FOR PRIMARY CARE

The Harvard Medical School Center for Primary Care will draw together an unparalleled set of resources—our top-flight students, our exceptional quadrangle-based and affiliated hospital-based faculty, our colleagues in other Harvard schools, and our extensive network of national and international collaborators—to focus on key areas of primary care education and investigation.

Through the Center, we will aim to reinforce exposure of all students to primary care; support students in identifying opportunities in primary care education, research, practice, and practice improvement; provide national leadership in primary care research and clinical innovation; and advocate and lead change in health policy and reform of our national health care system.

This is an ambitious agenda, and one whose execution will, we believe, require us to create a Center with four key attributes:

Seasoned and Well-Supported Leadership The Center’s work will be driven by a Center Director—a senior national figure in primary care research and/or education—who once

¹ Grundy, Paul, Kay R. Hagan, Jennie Chin Hansen, Kevin Grumbach, “The Multi-Stakeholder Movement for Primary Care Renewal and Reform,” *Health Affairs* 29, no. 5, 2010, pp. 760-765.

recruited would be supported by an endowed professorship to be located in either our Department of Health Care Policy or our Department of Global Health and Social Medicine. In addition, the Center Director would have a clinical appointment in a Harvard teaching affiliate hospital.

In addition, we will establish a Center Executive Oversight Committee to oversee Center operations. The Center Director will be accountable to the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine. We will also establish a Center Advisory Board composed of experts in the field of primary care within and beyond the Harvard community—including international representatives—as well as internal stakeholders including student and resident representatives.

Community Building and Discourse In addition to core faculty based at the Center—likely from the fields of general internal medicine and pediatrics—the Center will play a much-needed role in promoting active discourse among the many strong primary care practitioners, divisions, and centers based in our teaching affiliate hospitals, as well as in affiliated community sites such as community health centers and other practice networks.

We envision holding regular symposia, workshops, and roundtables where members of our broad primary care community and others with relevant expertise from other fields can come together around specific topics and issues in the field. We also plan to employ the *Harvard Catalyst* website (the site of our Clinical and Translational Research Center)—along with a dedicated Center website—to make readily accessible for students and trainees the many research and educational opportunities in primary care at Harvard.

Advocacy and Mentoring At Harvard—from the level of medical students through quadrangle-based and hospital-based faculty—the Center will model more defined and compelling scholarly career trajectories in primary care, and strengthen mentorship for primary care research faculty seeking promotion. As indicated earlier, we believe that these internal efforts will have an important external effect as well—that our actions to promote and strengthen primary care education and research at home will be noted, shifting views and practices in the field of primary care more broadly.

With these basic principles and underpinnings in place, we will launch specific programs through the Harvard Medical School Center for Primary Care, focusing on education, research, and innovation.

Center Program for Primary Care Education

Primary care physicians will play a prominent role in health care system redesign in this country over the coming decades. Harvard Medical School, along with only a handful of peer institutions nationally, has the capacity to combine medical education with a powerful policy research engine and, through our teaching hospital affiliates, with a vast primary care practice experiences. For these reasons, we believe we can contribute to the creation of uniquely trained primary care physicians, positioned to lead in these system reform efforts.

In order to train all students, regardless of career interests, in primary care skills and appreciate the role of primary care in health care systems, and to create leaders in primary care disciplines

who will contribute to efforts in health system reform, we envision establishing, based in the Center for Primary Care, two initial entities:

- *Primary Care Education Committee*, to evaluate regularly the quality and scope of educational opportunities for medical students, trainees, and faculty in the field of primary care across Harvard and its teaching affiliate hospitals. This committee can propose to the curriculum committee and, when appropriate, facilitate implementation of enhanced primary care education in existing courses as well as other opportunities—for example, the creation of new curricular offerings or of special primary care interest groups, seminar series, journal clubs, or fourth-year clinical experiences.
- Dedicated primary care funds within our *Scholars in Medicine Program*, through which medical students may conduct research projects with faculty leaders in primary care, based at Harvard Medical School or in a teaching hospital affiliate, either over a summer or over the course of an academic year.

Center Program for Primary Care Policy and Innovation Research

The Center will also provide a new and more integrated academic home for primary care scholarship, particularly in the area of health care policy and primary care innovation, both domestically and internationally. Harvard Medical School, and Harvard University more broadly, is home to some of the most incisive minds in health policy research, including primary care research. The Center for Primary Care will play a critical role in coordinating and making more visible in our own community the primary care research, and researchers, already prominent in the field today. In addition, the Center will make medical students aware of this research, and can offer opportunities for them to participate in it. To accomplish these goals, we plan to establish in the Center, two initial entities:

- *Primary Care Scholarship Committee*, to evaluate the quality and scope of research opportunities for students, trainees, and faculty in the field of primary care across Harvard and its teaching affiliate hospitals. This committee would, for example, enlist the assistance of *Harvard Catalyst's* website and staff to provide information to our trainees and faculty on funding sources, as well as help in preparing grant proposals and accessing research mentors from the Harvard community, including hospital-based faculty.
- *Primary Care Research and Innovation Pilot Grants Program*, to provide funds for cross-institutional, multi-disciplinary research that will bring together students and faculty throughout the Harvard community to investigate new avenues in primary care policy and clinical innovations. This will allow students and faculty alike to explore novel ideas related to primary care. It will also expose medical students more effectively to the breadth of research and practice in primary care across the Harvard medical community and the Harvard community more broadly.

There is enormous opportunity in the creation of the Harvard Medical School Center for Primary Care. The need in our country—medically and economically—for new approaches to primary care delivery is acute. With the launching of this Center, we will introduce a new set of voices and views both into the debate over health care system reform, and into the concrete efforts to

enact reform. Drawing on Harvard's breadth of expertise in multiple disciplines related to primary care, its longstanding collaborations nationally and internationally, and its capacity for real innovation—the Harvard Medical School Center for Primary Care will play a much-needed, pivotal role in transforming primary care delivery in this country.