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Posted on Thu, May 31, 2007

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AS I SEE IT | Administrators should listen to faculty voices

By JON SCHEINMAN

In the pages of *The Kansas City Star* it appears as if there is overwhelming support by the faculty for the Kansas University Medical Center administration's affiliation agreements with the University of Kansas and St. Luke's hospitals. In fact, the voice of the faculty has not been heard. The danger for area residents is that these agreements could affect the quality of medical training and medical care itself.



Jon Scheinman on hospital affiliation agreements

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The KU Medical Center is well-respected by community leaders, patients and medical practitioners, because its excellence comes from the creativity and research activities of the faculty. The faculty is chosen by a jury of its peers. That same type of peer review, a tenure system, also supports and evaluates all research. And it manages medical education through academic committees.

This tenure system demands faculty freedom from undue influence by the administration (and politicians) on its appointments, its teaching methods and what it teaches. The administration is to support the faculty, not to be an all-powerful ruler. Faculty peer review of appointments and actions by the administration is required, but at KU Medical Center this has frequently been bypassed.

The Medical Center is also seeking a revised Council Center designation. Does it require new affiliations? With the current national peer review of research, there are essentially no barriers to research. The only barriers are artificial, by hospitals, to protect their sales "brand" or other exclusivity. An evaluation by the faculty of the need for teaching affiliations, and the effect on teaching, was never proposed or done.

If the administration chooses to appoint teaching clinicians, without peer review, giving faculty status in exchange for financial support from an affiliated hospital (which wants new residents, legitimate faculty credentials, are devalued. Hiring more "contingent faculty" (clinical appointments without genuine peer review or security) sidesteps the tenure system.

These appointments may have a money-making advantage over tenured faculty, who are required to generate unprofitable papers and research.

Faculty can be chosen for money-making ability, not for the needs of education or new knowledge. What may appear to be a "far" incentive plan, imposed on tenured faculty, requires unfair patient-care competition, then removes the salary and drives out the peer-reviewed faculty. KU Medical Center could be left with only non-peer-reviewed faculty, busy advertising its credentials to attract patients.

What is the win-win solution? Allow the full and independent examination by the elected Faculty Council, including Wichita, and the American Association of University Professors, of all proposed affiliation agreements. Administration should not continue to run resident education solely through administrative appointments, which excludes the full faculty from its rightful role in education.

Jon Scheinman is a professor of pediatrics at Kansas University Medical Center and president of its chapter of the American Association of University Professors. He lives in Fairway.

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