

House Committee on Aging and Long Term Care
Feb. 17, 2009

HB 2297/Geriatric medicine,
approved KU postgraduate residency training program
Martin Kennedy, Deputy Secretary

Chairman Bethell and members of the committee, the Kansas Department on Aging appreciates the opportunity to express its written support of HB 2297. This bill would expand the list of approved postgraduate residency training programs to include fellowship training in geriatric medicine or geriatric psychiatry.

The need for doctors trained in geriatric medicine or geriatric mental health grows greater every year. While the U.S. population age 55 is growing rapidly, according to a 2005 census report, the number of medical school graduates going into geriatrics has been slow to keep up.

The focus of geriatric care is somewhat different than that of specialists in other areas of health care. The particular focus of caring for frail elders includes an understanding of how to assess and determine the individual's ability to function which is often as important as understanding their diseases. Geriatric medicine coordinates long-term care for chronic conditions; managing, not curing, a collection of overlapping chronic conditions, and balancing the risks and benefits of multiple medications.

There are 323 licensed nursing facilities in Kansas and each is required to have a medical director on staff. Because of already low numbers of physicians, particularly in rural areas, many find it difficult to fill this position. We believe the passage of HB 2297 would help lessen this problem.

The Kansas Department on Aging supports the passage of HB 2297.