UCSF Fresno Graduates First Hmong Psychiatrist
Awards named in memory of Steven N. Parks, MD, and Melissa Dowd, MD, will be presented

WHO:
Eighty-nine (89) resident physicians will graduate from UCSF Fresno Medical Education Program in a ceremony on June 13. The graduates include Michael Thao, MD, who is believed to be one of the first Hmong psychiatrists, as well as recipients of leadership and community service awards. Thirty percent of the graduating physicians are expected to stay and care for patients in the greater Fresno area and the central San Joaquin Valley.

Media are invited to attend the graduation and the social hour leading up to it.

WHAT:
Dr. Thao, other graduates and UCSF Fresno faculty members will be available for interviews and photo/video opportunities during and after the graduation ceremony.

A number of awards will be presented, including the following special recognitions named for late members of the UCSF Fresno family:

- Steven N. Parks, MD, Leadership Award sponsored by the Fresno-Madera Medical Society
- Melissa Dowd, MD, Community Service Award presented by Steve Dowd

WHEN:
Thursday, June 13
5:30 p.m. Social Hour
6:30 p.m. Graduation Ceremony

WHERE:
William Saroyan Theater
700 M Street
Fresno

Media: Please call (559) 313-6539 to confirm attendance. Interviews will be available during the social hour prior to the start of the graduation ceremony.
BACKGROUND:

Each year, UCSF Fresno graduates approximately 90 physicians from its residency and fellowship programs. Residency training prepares recently graduated MDs and Doctors of Osteopathic Medicine to become specialists, including pediatricians and family practitioners, in approximately three to five years. Fellowships offer specific training beyond residency in an area of expertise such as cardiology. Fellowships generally last one to two years. Thirty to 50 percent of these graduating medical residents and fellows stay in the San Joaquin Valley to practice their specialty and provide care for community members.

“We are proud of all of our graduates,” said Gene Kallsen, MD, interim assistant dean at UCSF Fresno. “Our physicians are improving access to health and health care by teaching the next generation of doctors, researching health issues that matter to Valley residents, helping the community and providing much-needed care. Their success is our success and we wish them well.”

Among this year’s graduates is Michael Thao, MD, who is believed to be one of only two Hmong psychiatrists. The other is Thao’s classmate from medical school, who is completing residency training at Duke University this year.

Thao’s parents emigrated from Laos to the U.S. in 1979. The youngest of four siblings, Thao was born and raised in Michigan. He has a bachelor’s in sociology, with a sub-concentration in social inequality, from the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor. He earned an MD from the University of Minnesota.

Thao chose UCSF Fresno after completing a medical school rotation here. He also has family in the area and wanted to be near a large Hmong community. Thao completed residency training in psychiatry at UCSF Fresno and will join the VA Central California Health System as a staff psychiatrist and assistant clinical professor at UCSF Fresno.

“I’ve always had a passion to care for the underserved,” said Thao. “During my psychiatry rotation in medical school, I quickly learned that the mentally ill are a particularly vulnerable population. My experience as a Hmong-American has helped me develop perspective that enables me to contribute to cultural competency in medicine.”

“Dr. Thao has been a truly exceptional resident and we are pleased that he will be staying in Fresno to practice,” said Craig Campbell, MD, program director of the UCSF Fresno Psychiatry Residency Program. “I am certain that he will be an invaluable professional resource to our community.”

Established in 1975, UCSF Fresno is a clinical campus of UC San Francisco. UCSF Fresno plays a vital role in providing healthcare services to residents of the San Joaquin Valley, training medical professionals in the region, conducting research that addresses regional health issues and preparing a pipeline of students for careers in health and medicine.

UC San Francisco is the nation’s leading university exclusively focused on health and is dedicated to transforming health worldwide through advanced biomedical research, graduate-level education in the life sciences and health professions, and excellence in patient care.

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