

Counting the good done by EVMS

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Eastern Virginia Medical School graduates hundreds of medical professionals every spring. Chances are good that at least one EVMS alum will treat you for some malady or another.

But EVMS, according to a new study it commissioned, has an impact beyond the examination or operating room. The school is also a major driver of economic activity in Hampton Roads. (Full disclosure: Pilot Publisher Maurice Jones is the school's current rector; he had no involvement in the preparation of this editorial.)

The study by former Old Dominion University President James Koch, the economics professor who prepares The State of the Region report, concludes that EVMS has an annual economic impact of \$823.6 million, up 18 percent from 2007. It is the region's 20th largest employer, providing work for 1,379 people who make an annual average wage of \$78,989.

That number is higher than the regional and national averages for health professionals and nearly double the median wage in Hampton Roads.

Its doctors and other graduates in the region - more than 900 of them - make more than \$100 million a year in salary alone, according to Koch's study. They provide more than \$50 million in charitable care, a figure almost certainly inflated by the lousy economy.

As Koch notes, if EVMS didn't exist, we'd be the largest metropolitan area without a medical school. Care would be worse than it is now.

There are hard costs as well, Koch noted: Somebody else would have to provide about \$220 million in medical care for the poor. Patients would have to travel farther for treatment. The costs total \$132 for every human being in Hampton Roads.

That's a lot of money. And it helps makes the case that the state should be spending as much on EVMS as it does on its medical schools in Richmond and Charlottesville. That's a case that the leaders of EVMS have been trying to make for decades. In the meantime, the state has been getting a bargain of unconscionable measure.

But the economic impact of EVMS is nowhere near the whole story.

Despite Koch's best efforts, it's impossible to know exactly what would happen if EVMS weren't at the end of Brambleton Avenue. Just as it's hard to know with precision what indirect financial impact EVMS has on the lives of the people of Hampton Roads.

What we do know: EVMS employs hundreds of our neighbors and friends. It educates doctors and nurses and technicians for Hampton Roads and the world. They in turn provide care for the sick and dying. This school does good, here and elsewhere, and that doesn't come with a price tag or an economic impact.