Early in the 20th century, patients suffering from tuberculosis, asthma, arthritis and polio flocked to Arizona as doctors worldwide prescribed the mythical healing powers of our state’s natural climate.

Today, as the Phoenix Business Journal’s recent health care issue attested, Arizona’s growing status as a nationally acclaimed center for medical treatment – highlighted by Banner Health’s recent merger with the University of Arizona Health Network – has the potential to transform the state’s standing in the world of medicine and research.

Arizona’s world-class medical facilities now are supported by excellent biomedical medical research at our research-performing institutions. Now, Arizona must ensure it attracts and retains exceptional biomedical and bioengineering talent by investing in the human capital needed to further elevate the quality and recognition of our esteemed medical care and research facilities.

Science Foundation Arizona has invested significantly in deepening the state’s talent pool, bringing the brightest and best minds to Arizona and facilitating their breakthroughs at the state’s research institutions, including universities, TGen, Barrow Neurological Institute and Phoenix Children’s Hospital.

From 2007 to 2014, 297 of the nation’s top scholars relocated to Arizona through SFAZ’s Graduate Research Fellows (GRFs) program, which strengthens Arizona’s three research universities and contributes to the vitality of the state’s scientist and engineer base. The Foundation’s Bisgrove Scholars program draws outstanding early-career engineers and scientists from around the globe to conduct pioneering research in Arizona.

Participants for the fellowship programs are vetted and selected by international experts in science, innovation and engineering. Nearly a third of these exceptional scholars and researchers are working on breakthroughs in bioscience, medicine and biotechnology.

Of the GRFs who have graduated with a PhD, many now are employed in Arizona. Xenia Lachur started an Arizona-based company developing pathology devices to improve surgical treatments of cancer. Arizona native Sarah Letting is an aortic product specialist at W.L. Gore in Flagstaff.

The payoff: Arizona is engaging extraordinary talent, reaping the benefits of their work and growing a highly skilled workforce.

For a sustainable health and science economy, it isn’t enough to only attract exceptional talent, Arizona must also nurture and grow it. Many GRFs volunteered one day a week during their fellowship to work with middle and high school teachers and students, and participate in summer teaching internships, propelling younger students along the STEM pathway.

If Arizona continues to invest in attracting and developing top-tier talent, we can hold true to our earliest identity as a worldwide destination for healing – not just because of climate, but also for an unparalleled medical and science workforce.

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