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**INTERVIEWER:** Some University of Minnesota Medical School students plan to rally tomorrow to oppose the merger of Fairview Health System with South Dakota based Sanford Health. Fairview runs the U of M's Medical Center. There are several bills moving in the Minnesota legislature that would block or delay the merger, a move that's endorsed by the head of the U's medical school, Dr. Jakub Tolar.

With more about the concerns of the medical school leaders and staff, Dr. Bevan Yueh is on the line. Dr. Yueh is the CEO of the University of Minnesota Physician Group, and Vice Dean of Clinical Affairs at the Medical School. Welcome, Dr. Yueh.

**BEVAN YUEH:** Thank you for having me.

**INTERVIEWER:** Thanks for being here. The CEO of Sanford says the concern over the university has nothing to do with the Sanford Fairview merger. On KARE 11 last night, he said there's a contract that's in place between Fairview and the U that runs until 2026, and the university's indecision about what it wants to do and how it wants to proceed should in no way hold back the merger. What's your response to that?

**BEVAN YUEH:** Well, I think that's a little disappointing to hear. We very much enjoy our clinical partnership with Fairview Hospital. We've had a 25-year relationship with them. We've developed strong working relationships.

I believe that since the university joined with Fairview to form what we now call M Health Fairview, our joint clinical enterprise, we have increased our quality, we've increased the accessibility to university academic medicine, and we value that relationship very much. A merger would change that substantially.

**INTERVIEWER:** How so?

**BEVAN YUEH:** The merger would change--

**INTERVIEWER:** How so?

**BEVAN YUEH:** It would change-- well, it would change how decisions are made. It would change governance. It would change the relationships that we've developed with Fairview over 25 years.

And so we are just watching with a lot of caution. We would prefer to be part of the discussions on how an academic center is developed. And we're disappointed that sometimes we hear that they don't feel we are an essential partner in their move forward.

**INTERVIEWER:** Fairview has been struggling financially, as you know. And its CEO says it can survive even if there is no merger with Sanford, but it probably won't thrive, as he says, in a way that Minnesotans deserve. That doesn't seem like a beneficial situation for the university. Is the U of M able to successfully pull away from Fairview and take back its facilities-- when the U struggled a number of years ago, which led to the partnership with Fairview?

**BEVAN YUEH:** Yeah, I think what we are really seeking to do is to find a real good clinical partner. And we thought we had one with Fairview, and we would like to think that we continue to have one with Fairview. When we joined in 2019 to form M Health Fairview, we had a partner that we believe really embraced academic medicine.

Academic medicine is an incredible combination of training the new doctors that work in our state. You've heard that we train more than 70% of the doctors here. It's about making the discoveries and discovering the new treatments that-- not only can we offer here at the university, but through our connections with the community-- pass them on to the community so that people in every part of Minnesota has access to those discoveries.

And then UMP-- University of Minnesota Physicians-- is the actual clinical delivery mechanism. People sometimes don't know that we have over 1,700 physicians and APPs that offer care. We saw 1.2 million visits last year. And we're very proud that we offer a very compassionate, innovative, accessible, and most importantly, very high quality level of care. So we very much hope that we will be able to continue with those partnerships and that's what's most important to us.

**INTERVIEWER:** Can the U move forward without a partner? I know that you are thinking about-- or would like to get the state legislature to kick in about \$1 billion to build a state-of-the-art teaching hospital. And we've been reporting that this has been in the works for a while. But is this plan moving faster because of the potential merger?

**BEVAN YUEH:** Well, the university announced its Impact Health Innovation Vision a few weeks ago. And what is in there is, yes, there's definitely thoughts that we have about how we could move forward with the hospital renovations for the existing hospitals. We could reacquire the hospitals as well.

But a very important part of that vision is to have partnerships. And I think that was the third vision point in there, is that we really value having partners to help us deliver care throughout the state. So yes, we can move forward, but we would much prefer to do it with partners that are really wanting to embrace all the wonderful things that we believe that academic medicine brings.

**INTERVIEWER:** And Fairview is not the partner you think at this point?

**BEVAN YUEH:** Well, they are our partner. We continue to have a relationship with them for the next four years. And my hope is that we will be able to work with them, to continue beyond 2026. We're hoping that Fairview and Sanford include us as a central part of their discussions and not a secondary part.

**INTERVIEWER:** As you know, Attorney General Keith Ellison says he thinks the merger is moving too fast. He is considering delaying the procedure. Do you support that?

**BEVAN YUEH:** Yeah, that's our issue is, we feel like, in order for us to become a central part of these negotiations, we need them to slow down a little bit. And I think we heard that at-- I was at the Worthington hearing and I was also at the Grand Rapids hearing. And I want to thank Attorney General Ellison for offering those, and for the communities for coming in let us speak.

And I heard the communities as well. And what we heard is, yes, people value the university. They would like us to be part of it. And we just would like time to work with them.

**INTERVIEWER:** All right. Dr. Yueh, thank you for your time.

**BEVAN YUEH:** You're welcome. Thank you.

**INTERVIEWER:** Dr. Bevan Yueh is the CEO of the University of Minnesota Physicians Group and Vice Dean of Clinical Affairs at the University of Minnesota Medical School.