



Meeting Washington's Healthcare Needs

In a country dealing with health issues ranging from cancer and heart disease to obesity and mental illness, one critical solution remains unavailable for many Americans, especially those in rural areas and underserved populations: access to primary care physicians.

This national need is acute and growing. It is especially pronounced in Washington state. In fact, 16 of the state's 39 counties average fewer than 10 physicians per 10,000 residents. These residents live mostly in rural areas where hospitals and clinics often struggle to attract doctors to their communities. The situation is predicted to only worsen in the years to come due to a number of factors, including the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, an aging baby boomer population, and an increase in doctors retiring with a relatively low number of new doctors graduating.

To help address this need, Washington State University is studying the potential creation of a new independent medical school in Spokane, sponsored

by WSU. A comprehensive feasibility study should be completed in June.

While WSU is engaged in the feasibility study, the University of Washington also is engaged in discussions about how the current 40+-year-old WWAMI consortium model—whereby medical students in Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho graduate through the University of Washington medical program—can evolve to better serve the healthcare needs of not only our state, but also the needs of each state represented in the consortium.

WSU believes that Washington's need for new primary care physicians is too great for the current education model to be effective any longer. The state

currently provides 120 seats for in-state medical students. Meanwhile, states with a similar population provide approximately 500 seats. Further, states with similar populations to Washington average five medical schools. Washington has one publicly funded medical school, and that single school is expected to cover the medical education needs for five states.

The idea of creating a new, independently accredited medical school is worth active exploration. WSU remains

open to pursuing whatever solution will best deliver more primary care physicians to serve the citizens and communities of our state. It is abundantly clear that the status quo is no longer adequate.

More information about the need for expanded medical school capacity and the strong foundation WSU has already created to support such an endeavor in partnership with the vibrant medical industry in Spokane is available at medicine.wsu.edu.

Ratio of Physicians to Population

Physicians per 10,000 residents by county in the state of Washington

