

NP - 203/909 - Montana Medical Education: WWAMI Expansion

Adding 10 more students to WWAMI: Montana's Medical School

Montana WWAMI proposes to add 10 students to current annual enrollment. Half of these additional students will participate in the Montana TRUST (Targeted Rural Underserved Track) program. Initiated in 2008 by Montana, TRUST is a unique rural medical education effort aimed at inspiring students to return to the rural and underserved areas of Montana and currently enrolls 5 students out of each class of 20.

Montana needs physicians, especially in rural areas:

- At least 53 of the 56 counties in Montana are federally designated in part or total as primary-care physician shortage areas.
- Nine counties in Montana are without any physicians, and 12 counties are without primary-care doctors, which include family medicine, pediatric and internal medicine.
- At least 24.5 percent of active Montana physicians are age 60 or older (higher than the national average) and are likely to retire within five years.
- The Montana Department of Labor and Industry reports that there are 19 openings annually for primary-care physicians.
- Currently, 14 percent of Montana's population is 65 or older, a group that is expected to increase to 25 percent by the year 2025 and be disproportionately located in rural areas.

WWAMI inspires students to practice primary care in rural areas:

Each year, Montana selects 20 of its residents to participate in the WWAMI program, a 40-year-old cooperative medical education program involving Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana and Idaho. Montana students spend their first year at Montana State University-Bozeman and then go to the University of Washington School of Medicine, one of the best schools in the world for training primary-care physicians. The WWAMI cooperative educates physicians at significantly lower costs than traditional medical school models and inspires students to practice primary care in rural areas — one of the greatest areas of need in Montana, the West and the nation.

WWAMI graduates practice medicine in Montana:

The third and fourth year clinical training opportunities in Montana attract WWAMI students originating elsewhere in the region, as well as Montana students, resulting in a 56 percent overall return rate, or approximately 11 WWAMI trained physicians per year returning to Montana to practice medicine. This is far better than the national average return rate of 39 percent for publically funded medical schools.

WWAMI helps Montana recruit and retain its current physicians:

The opportunity to teach in the Montana WWAMI program aids in physician recruitment and retention. Many Montana physicians value the opportunity to participate in the education of medical students and continue the tradition in which they were trained as physicians. More than 325 Montana physicians are WWAMI faculty, which is one-eighth of the practicing physician population.

WWAMI is Montana's best bet for attracting physicians:

Every year, Montana has about 50 students who attend medical school nationally, with 20 of those students enrolled in the Montana WWAMI program. Without WWAMI, Montana would be at a severe disadvantage in educating its residents and inspiring them to return to comparatively lower paying primary-care positions in the face of their large student debt, which averages more than \$120,000. Not only is WWAMI one of the most cost-effective ways to train physicians, but WWAMI emphasizes the types of medicine needed by the state of Montana.

WWAMI delivers a strong return to the state of Montana:

For every dollar allocated to the program by the state of Montana, \$5.14 dollars are generated in the statewide economy. Unlike the support given by the state to students who study at other medical schools, more than half the WWAMI funds are spent in Montana.

WWAMI is strengthening its ties to Montana:

- Expansion of required third and fourth year training sites in Montana from 7 to 33 since 2005 involving 11 Montana communities.
- During this academic year, 172 WWAMI students will do 235 required and elective clerkships in Montana.
- The Montana Track program initiated in 2008 will train 5 students in Missoula and 5 students in Billings for the entirety of their third year in 2012-2013.
- The WRITE (WWAMI Rural Integrated Training Experience) program, which places students in rural/underserved clinics for five months of education, was recently expanded to seven sites in Montana.
- The RUOP program — Rural/Underserved Opportunities Program — which places first-year students in rural and underserved practices for a month, placed 31 students in Montana this past summer.

The TRUST program uniquely trains students for rural practice in Montana:

- The summer before their first year, TRUST students spend two weeks with a physician in a rural community that they will return to over the next four years.
- Students visit the rural community and work with the physician twice during their first year.
- During the summer between their first and second year, students spend four weeks in the community for their RUOP, Rural/Underserved Opportunities Program.
- During their third year, students return for a 20-week WRITE rotation (WWAMI Rural Integrated Teaching Experience), which includes clinical experiences in most elements of primary care from family medicine, to psychiatry, to pediatrics.
- After graduation, WWAMI offers students internal medicine opportunities to do their residency in rural areas.