Wyoming WWAMI Program: A Look Back and Forward
By Larry E. Kirven, MD

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Wyoming joined the WWAMI program in 1997 with a class of 10 students, becoming the second “W” and the fifth state in the regional medical education program affiliated with the University Of Washington School Of Medicine (UWSOM).

In 2013, the Wyoming WWAMI program had a leadership change with First-year Program Director Matt McEchron, PhD, leaving to join the faculty at the University of Arizona, and Assistant Clinical Dean Rich Hillman, MD, retiring after 12 years. Timothy J. Robinson, PhD, is now the interim director of the first-year program, and Larry E. Kirven, MD, is the assistant clinical dean. Dean Steiner of the College of Health Sciences at the University of Wyoming has formed a search committee to select a permanent first-year program director.

A Steady Return
The Wyoming WWAMI program continues to provide successful medical education to Wyoming students and brings many of them back to the state as physicians. A total of 223 Wyoming students have been enrolled in the program, and only 2 students have left without finishing. There are 79 Wyoming graduates who have completed residency training, 52 of whom have returned to Wyoming to practice. Currently, there are 49 graduates of the program practicing in the state of Wyoming.

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Currently, there are 17 required third-year clerkships and a number of fourth-year clerkships in Wyoming. In 2014, there will be three new clerkships added to the program. OB/GYN clerkships will start in Gillette and Sheridan, and a Chronic Care clerkship will be offered in Cheyenne. There are three WRITE (WWAMI Rural Integrated Training Experience) sites in Wyoming. Located in Lander, Powell, and Douglas, these sites will each have a third-year student in their community for 22 weeks.

Adapting to a Changing System
The future of WWAMI will see curriculum renewal, which is a nationwide trend to modernize medical education. The majority of U.S. medical schools are renewing their curriculum to adapt to the country’s changing medical landscape. UWSOM is among many schools undergoing a renewal of their curriculum that will begin in 2015.
One of these changes will be to divide the educational experience into three phases: a Foundations Phase that will encompass the first 18 months, a Patient Care Phase, and an Explorations Phase. These changes will allow for earlier clinical teaching in the Foundations Phase as well as the introduction of longitudinal-integrated clerkships in the Patient Care Phase in place of the current “block” clerkship scheduling.

The goal of these changes is to streamline the medical educational experience, ensure the consistency of the educational content across the WWAMI region, and move toward competency-based medical education. Curriculum renewal will also serve to adapt medical education to meet the current physician workforce needs of society, particularly for the rural WWAMI region.

For Wyoming, this could include having students in Laramie for up to 15 months of the Foundations Phase, an increased need for clinical faculty in Laramie, and a re-structuring of some of the clinical clerkships to become integrated training experiences where students spend 22 to 28 weeks in one community.

Also for 2014, Wyoming will join the TRUST (Targeted Rural Underserved Training Track), which is a program that seeks to provide a continuous connection between rural and underserved communities, medical education, and health professionals in the WWAMI region. The program is based on linking an incoming student to a specific community within their home state for the duration of their medical school training.

In 2014, three student volunteers from the E2014 class will be asked to participate in a pilot of the TRUST program. In 2015, Wyoming students will have the opportunity to make a formal application to the TRUST program as a condition of acceptance to the UWSOM. In the future, it may be possible for up to five Wyoming students to participate in the program.

A Strong Partnership

The Wyoming WWAMI program has been fortunate to have very strong support since its inception from the Wyoming Medical Society (WMS). Many members of the WMS have contributed to medical education in the state of Wyoming by serving as mentors and clinical faculty. This strong commitment from the membership of the WMS is one of the major reasons why the WWAMI program has been so successful in Wyoming. With curriculum renewal there will be an even greater need for physician involvement in mentoring and clinical teaching, both in Laramie as well as all around the state.

The Wyoming WWAMI program and the University Of Washington School Of Medicine would like to thank the WMS and its membership for their contributions to the program. We hope to continue this successful partnership into the future as we adapt to the changing landscape of medicine and medical education.

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