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Medical education plan to be considered

Panel recommends ISU proposal 7-1

BOISE — The State Board of Education will consider Idaho State University's distributive medical education model next month after an interim legislative committee made its recommendation on Wednesday.

The interim legislative committee on medical education completed more than three months of work Wednesday when it recommended ISU's proposed medical school plan with a 7-1 vote.

The committee also recommended the board consider an existing medical school program that is looking to double the number of Idaho doctoral students attending the University of Washington's School of Medicine in Seattle. The committee's decision does not allow ISU to further develop its plan to establish a medical school in Idaho. While the university has taken a step forward in the process, there are still several steps to go.

If the State Board of Education approves ISU's pitch for a medical program, it then needs to go in front of the Idaho Legislature. With the Legislature's approval, the university can then further develop a plan it will submit to the Liaison Committee on Medical Education. The LCME is a nationally-recognized accreditation body for medical schools. The accreditation process for ISU's model, though, won't begin until late next year at the earliest.

ISU's distributive model will utilize the university's existing health science resources to house the first two years of the program. The first half of the students' medical curriculum will mostly involve in-class lectures while the last two years will send them to a clinical site in Idaho to gain some hands-on training.

ISU President Arthur Vailas said he was pleased with the committee's vote, adding that his university's plans for a medical program should benefit all the universities and family residency programs throughout the state. "It went well. They got a very good overview of what Idaho is facing," Vailas said. "I think this is a step forward for Idaho, and that's where my position has always been. It's a good thing that we can add to our project."

The Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana and Idaho Medical Program (WWAMI) also received a nod to show the State Board of Education its proposal to double the number of seats The University of Washington reserves for Idaho medical students.

The Idaho Legislature allocates more than \$3 million per year to send 20 Idaho students to Seattle. WWAMI, which has been operating since 1971, is proposing to increase those reserved seats to 40.

If the state board approves WWAMI's proposal next month, then the program will be allowed to further develop a business plan to increase the number of seats it reserves for Idaho students.

Some committee members said the economy was one of the largest roadblocks facing the state's hope to eventually establish its own medical program. Paul Ramsey, the dean for the UW's School of Medicine, presented WWAMI figures and highlighted the program's in-state return rates, which were higher than

nationwide averages for non-WWAMI medical programs.

Fifty percent of WWAMI's Idaho graduates return to Idaho to practice compared with 39 percent nationwide. Of those Idaho graduates, 48 percent go into primary care compared with 38 percent nationwide.

State Sen. Bob Geddes, R-Soda Springs, who co-chairs the committee, said Wednesday's resolution aimed to highlight the importance of all the existing medical education resources in Idaho while also showing support for a new program. The lawmaker said the state made some progress in attempting to alleviate its health care ills, but added that the economy has made it difficult for the committee to heavily pursue one option over the other. "We've seen how valuable our medical residency programs are. We can't be divided on this," Geddes said. "Our economy isn't asking us to slam on the brakes, but to slow down on the accelerator."