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FOR YOUR INFORMATION
The Lewiston Tribune
Lewiston, Idaho
Monday Feb. 13, 2017
by Nicholas K. Geranios (AP)
Page 1 of 2

Spokane sees boom in medical education

SPOKANE — Medical education is booming in Spokane.

A new medical school through Washington State University — plus a dramatic expansion of a modest medical training program operated by the University of Washington — mean hundreds of future doctors will soon be training in the eastern Washington city.

It's the culmination of years of efforts by civic leaders to expand education offerings that have the potential to expand the economy.

The most high-profile development is Washington State University's creation of the Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine, the nation's newest med school.

Named for the late WSU president who pushed for its creation, the Floyd College received preliminary accreditation in October and has started accepting applications for its first class. The school plans to enroll 60 students per class, with the first class starting in August.

WSU President Kirk Schulz said the accreditation news "puts us one step closer to educating physicians who will practice in Washington's underserved communities and furthers the university's land-grant mission to serve the needs of the state."

Getting less attention but just as significant is the University of Washington's decision to expand its medical training in Spokane.

The university has long operated the state's only public medical school. For years, it placed about 20 medical students per year in Spokane as part of its WWAMI program that trains doctors for the states of Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana and Idaho.

But the University of Washington last fall expanded that program to 60 first-year students in Spokane.

Now the UW is asking the Legislature for more than \$9 million, so it can train a total of 80 medical students per class in Spokane.

"We have created something very special in Spokane for Spokane," said Mari Clack, of the Friends of WWAMI, a group of community leaders formed to support UW students in Spokane. "This region needs more doctors to serve our aging population."

The UW School of Medicine partners with Gonzaga University to provide the medical training in the Lilac City.

The goal is to reduce the shortage of doctors, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Half the state's doctors work in the Seattle region, while many parts of the state do not have enough physicians.

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“The first step toward addressing a physician shortage is to educate more medical students, and especially those students who are interested in practicing rural medicine,” said Dr. Suzanne Allen, vice dean for Academic, Rural and Regional Affairs for UW.

“Our program has yielded very good results: 52 percent of our graduates have returned to Washington to practice, compared to the national average of 39 percent,” she said.

Medical students tend to practice where they train, Allen said.

“From our standpoint, the more time people spend here, the more they’ll want to work here,” Allen said.

Local leaders are excited about the economic benefits of medical training in the city of 210,000 residents.

Scott Morris, chief executive officer of Avista, the Spokane-based utility company, has estimated that medical education and related research has the potential for a \$1.7 billion annual economic benefit to the city.

“With two medical schools, the jobs that underpin the research, teaching and professional services will revitalize and diversify our economy,” Morris said.

But, “there is still much work to do to assure the success of both schools,” he said.

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