

UW Medicine

April 10, 2015

To: Faculty, Staff and Students
UW School of Medicine

Dear Faculty, Staff and Students,

The ongoing budget discussions in Olympia are at a critical stage for the future of our Spokane WWAMI program. I write to keep you informed of the issues and their potential consequences.

The Washington State Legislature recently repealed the 1917 law that makes the University of Washington the only state university that can develop an independent allopathic medical school in Washington. As a result, Washington State University (WSU) plans to pursue its goal of starting an independent medical school in Spokane.

Both WSU and the University of Washington (UW) have asked the legislature for funds to pursue our respective plans: WSU for initial costs (\$2.5 million) associated with accreditation that would build over time to a legislative request for over \$30 million per year and the UW for \$4.7 million to continue and expand Spokane WWAMI. Our request is to transfer funds that were allocated to WSU for WWAMI back to the UW. The transfer of these funds (\$4.7 million per year) would be revenue neutral for the State of Washington and would permit Spokane WWAMI to continue and expand. Spokane WWAMI currently educates 40 first-year medical students per year and up to 20 second-year medical students per year. With the \$4.7 million funding transfer to UW from WSU, Spokane WWAMI would have sufficient state support to teach 60 students per year in the classroom phase of medical education in Spokane.

In a short period of time, Spokane WWAMI has developed a track record of offering high-quality, cost-effective medical education in pursuit of developing physicians for Spokane, eastern Washington and the rural and underserved parts of the state. We are very proud of Spokane WWAMI and the many faculty, staff and students who are contributing to its success.

The University of Washington is advocating strongly to protect Spokane WWAMI from budget cuts that would harm the program and substantially impede our long-standing goal of increasing the number of physicians for the state.

Budget proposals have been released recently in Olympia, and the prospects for the UW School of Medicine in Spokane are mixed. The House of Representatives budget provides us with sufficient

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funding – \$4.7 million per year to be transferred from WSU to the UW – to pursue the course we set together with Spokane: to continue the excellence of the teaching in Spokane and expand the number of students in Spokane’s classrooms. If this budget approach is adopted, the class size expansion will contribute to the UW’s ongoing work to address the doctor shortage in Washington. We will also be able to continue to serve Spokane-based students.

The Senate budget, however, defunds our current efforts in Spokane – likely eliminating operations and taking expansion off the table. Only \$1.25 million in annual funding is provided to the UW for Spokane WWAMI—well below the House funding level of \$4.7 million per year.

It is important to emphasize that Washington State University receives nearly \$5 million per year in funds designated by the legislature for teaching UW medical students in the WWAMI program. University of Washington leadership has attempted to negotiate the transfer of these funds to the UW, but WSU has not agreed to the transfer. Therefore, we are seeking legislative support as described above for the return of these funds for their intended purpose—education of UW medical students in the WWAMI program.

If the Senate budget is adopted, Spokane WWAMI is in serious jeopardy. If not funded, we would continue with current plans for our students for academic year 2015-2016 but would be forced to reduce our Washington student class size or transfer some students back to the Seattle campus for first and second year training in future years. We would consider this a tremendous setback for our students, for the community of Spokane and the state of Washington.

If the worst case scenario happens and we cannot continue our Spokane WWAMI program, any changes to that program would not occur until AFTER the upcoming academic year. Students accepted to the first-year program for 2015-2016 would not be affected. They would be able to complete their entire 18-month UW Foundations curriculum in Spokane. In addition, current first-year students who have agreed to complete their second year in Spokane would not be affected; the second year program will take place in 2015-2016 regardless of budget decisions in the legislature.

The educational quality available to all of these students will be the same high-quality education received by ALL of our students. We are—and will remain—deeply committed to our students, faculty, staff and friends in Spokane.

The UW School of Medicine remains the #1 ranked program in the United States for primary care training, family medicine and rural health. It has also been proven to be the most cost effective approach to medical education. The proposed plan from WSU would cost the State of Washington at least \$30,000 per student per year more than the cost of the UW School of Medicine program. I do not believe our state should fund a new medical school that would cost taxpayers nearly twice as much per medical student as the existing program. I am committed to doing everything possible to ensure that Spokane WWAMI continues, expands and thrives.

The UW leadership team will work hard over the coming weeks with our community supporters in Spokane and around the state to deliver our message to the legislature and the Governor about what is at stake in this year's biennial budget proposal for medical education in our state. I will keep you informed as we receive additional or new information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul G. Ramsey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P".

Paul G. Ramsey, M.D.
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Executive Vice President for Medical Affairs and
Dean of the School of Medicine,
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