

Doctors hosts WWAMI Rural Health students

By Polly Taylor
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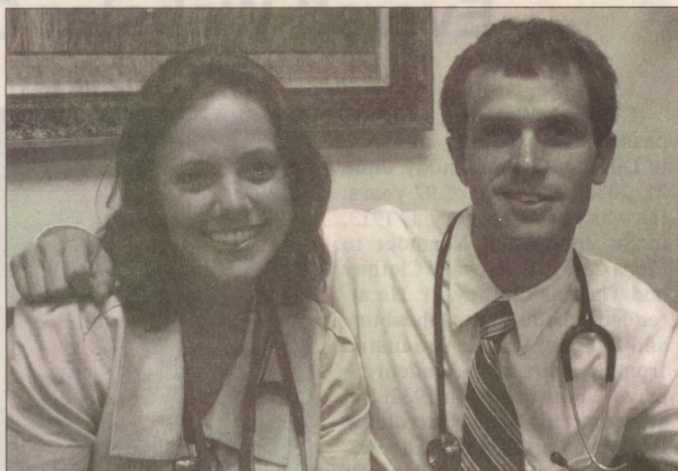
Two first-year students from the University of Washington medical school have been working on projects during the past few weeks in Dillon. They are part of the WWAMI Program (Wyoming, Washington, Alaska, Montana and Idaho). Of the listed states, Washington is the only one that offers a medical school.

The University of Washington places emphasis on primary health care in rural areas, requiring students to spend four weeks in various towns, exposing them to, and having them work with, doctors who provide rural health care.

Lauren Olsen, of Seattle, Wash., who received her undergraduate degree in biology and peace studies at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania, has been in Dillon since last week. While she is here, she will be working on putting together a booklet to assist cardiac-rehab patients. It will include a journal and exercises.

Olsen has been assigned to work with Dr. Sandra McIntyre, who specializes in internal medicine. She interacts with McIntyre's patients both on a one-on-one basis, and with the doctor. The majority of patients are adults, over the age of 18, many of which suffer from diabetes.

Prior to arriving in Dillon, Olsen spent time in Africa and



Rural Health students

Lauren Olsen and Cody Hood, first-year medical school students, are in Dillon learning about the advantages of working in rural and primary health care through the WWAMI program. Polly Taylor photo

Ecuador. She has also worked with the group Doctors Without Borders, focusing on pediatric HIV cases. While she said she would definitely want to do something in primary care at some point in the future, she is also very interested in getting involved in public health. She hopes to eventually get a master's degree in public health.

"There is a very large population of elderly patients in Dillon, which surprised me, but they have been so wonderful and welcoming. They are so patient when I am taking their history, and then they are asked the same questions all over

again when Dr. McIntyre comes in to see them," states Olsen, who will be in the area for three more weeks before returning to Washington.

Her classmate, Cody Hood, has been in Dillon for three weeks, and will be leaving at the end of this week. He is a Montana native, hailing from Eureka, and was sent here as part of the same Rural Health program and WWAMI.

A graduate of Montana State University, Bozeman, with a degree in engineering, Hood intends to return to the mountains of Montana once he has finished medical school.

In an attempt to sharpen his Spanish language skills, which he noted have come in handy while seeing Hispanic patients in Dillon, he spent time in Ecuador working as a volunteer with a two-week health program. He also spent time in Chile, Argentina and Peru.

The medical student is working with Dr. Burke Hansen, in whose home he has been staying while in Dillon.

Hood's project, which will culminate his four weeks in the area, includes cooking a dinner for a select group of patients with gestational diabetes. While it is not a research project, it is meant to be informative, showing the patients what they should be eating in order to avoid exacerbating the diabetes, and enjoying the food.

The dinner, which will include low-fat and low glycemic index foods, will include a variety of vegetables.

Hood also works with patients, both in the presence of Hansen, and singly. He said, "The patients and residents of Dillon have been incredibly supportive. I went to the YMCA to get some ideas of what I could do for my project, and the people there were very helpful, offering a number of suggestions."

Once finished with medical school, Hood would like to go into primary care or emergency room medicine.