

Over 100 attend UAA Premed Summit

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Anchorage, Alaska - More than 100 people attended Alaska's first Premed Summit.



Shawn Wilson/KTUU-TV

Organizers hope the students at Saturday's conference will fill a critical gap in the future. Organizers say by the year 2020, Alaska will need 800 more doctors in the state. They say, with the senior population expected to triple, the time to think about this issue is now.

At Rasmussen Hall at the University of Alaska Anchorage, the lesson is about the interview. In addition to their GPAs and MCATs, it's a lesson these students need to know if they want to get into medical school and become Alaska's future physicians.

Summer Engler helped with Saturday's demonstration and knows the importance of a good interview.

“On average they're about 50 percent of the deciding factor of whether or not you get into medical school,” said Engler, president of the University of Alaska Anchorage Premed Club.

About 120 students were here for the state's first ever Premed Summit. Saturday they learned how to apply for medical school and what it takes to be a competitive applicant and there is a lot of competition.

“We are getting, for example, 60 to 70 applications for the 10 positions we have in the WWAMI medical school program in the state each year,” said Dr. Dennis Valenzeno (right), director of the WWAMI biomedical program.

WWAMI is a regional medical school and the acronym stands for the states participating: Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana and Idaho.



Shawn Wilson/KTUU-TV

Organizers say they would like to increase the number of students accepted to the program from 10 to 20.

Engler is hoping for one of the slots.



“I do want to be a doctor and I hope to come back to Alaska and practice,” said Engler (left).

That's what organizers say they like to hear. They say Saturday's summit shows increased interest in medical education in the state and that the demand for physicians will only grow with time.

“If anything, it's looking like that shortage is going to be more acute in Alaska than it is in the rest of the nation in the next couple of decades,” said Valzeno .

Behind these doors, Engler waits for another mock interview. This time it's not in front of a crowd.

Engler grew up in Sterling and says she knows there are many areas in the state that need good doctors, especially in rural areas.

Minutes later she's back in the interview seat and a little over 10 minutes later, the interview is done, one step closer, she hopes, to a degree and a dream.

Organizers say the decision to increase the number of slots in the WWAMI Program is up to state lawmakers. If approved, the WWAMI program hopes to have 20 slots available in the fall of 2008.

Organizers say with a looming shortage nationwide, the competition for good doctors will rise.

Valzeno says the task force, which is looking at these changes, will look into a combination of approaches. He says they're expecting a severe shortage, so recruitment, retention and getting these new slots will be key factors. Also, others say they're looking to improve tracking of Alaska's medical students. Some of them, of course, are attending other medical schools. The task force will have a final report this summer.