



Virtual WWAMI

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Just like it has for everything else in the world of medicine, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a very significant effect on medical education in 2020.

All WWAMI medical students and staff in Laramie are currently being tested once a week for COVID-19, and the students have been discouraged from going to bars and restaurants. The first-year students are attending class in person but are wearing masks at all times, and a remote option for learning and class participation is available for students who are quarantined.

For the second-year students, all instruction is remote with

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the exception of the clinical skills and anatomy classes, and while the students do continue to participate in clinics with their primary care preceptors, they wear masks when seeing patients. Also, each fall the second-year students participate in a research symposium where they present posters about their research projects—this year they'll present their projects virtually instead of in person.

Perhaps the largest effect of the pandemic on medical student education has been on clinical clerkships. On March 16, 2020, all third- and fourth-year students across the entire WWAMI region were asked to go home: they did not return to clinical clerkships until June 29. During those three months, the students could participate in online classes for credit including an online pandemics course, however they were not allowed to participate in any clinical activities.

Unfortunately, fourth-year medical students who were planning to graduate in spring 2020 spent their last few months of medical school at home. The University of Washington School of Medicine was able to arrange for them to receive enough credits from online courses to graduate on time, however all graduation activities, such as the physician's oath

and hooding ceremonies, were virtual.

Third-year medical students lost three months of clinical education. In order to get them caught up after they returned at the end of June, the third-year clerkship schedule was shortened from 48 to 36 weeks. The internal medicine third-year clerkship was shortened from 12 to eight weeks and most of the other clerkships were shortened from six to four weeks. The students have been instructed not to participate in the care of patients with known COVID-19 infections.

Looking forward, we are hopeful that students who will be starting their third- and fourth-year clerkships in 2021 will have a regular clerkship schedule, with a full 48-week third-year clerkship schedule. Given the unpredictability of the pandemic, these plans may certainly change.

Regardless of what happens over the next few months with the pandemic, one of the biggest changes in 2021 will be the interview process. Formerly, Wyoming WWAMI medical school admissions interviews were done in Laramie and included a campus tour and lunch with faculty. This year, all interviews and tours will be online, and additionally all

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residency interviews nationally in 2021 will be virtual.

Unfortunately, it appears most likely that the 2021 spring medical school graduation ceremony will be virtual again next year.

The students and faculty that I've interacted with have all had an amazing can-do, positive attitude about the challenges facing medical education because of COVID-19. But I think that it's fair to say that we're all waiting and hoping for a better 2021. 