Improving Wisconsin’s Rural Medicine

Sixty percent of WARM students graduating in 2011 chose primary care for their residencies.

**Description:** While 30 percent of Wisconsinites live in rural areas, only 11 percent of physicians practice in rural areas, a wider gap than at the national level. As a result, 83 percent of Wisconsin’s 72 counties are underserved in health care. To address the state’s serious shortage of physicians in rural areas, the UW School of Medicine and Public Health created the Wisconsin Academy for Rural Medicine (WARM), with a development grant from OAC and renewal funding from PERC. The WARM program engages rural communities, hospitals, clinics and physicians in training future rural physicians.

**Results:** Nearly 70 percent of WARM students graduating from SMPH in 2011 and 2012 are staying in Wisconsin and 8 of 13 have chosen primary care for their residencies. Each year, the program now admits 25 medical students interested in practicing medicine in rural areas. WARM students who spend seven months or more in a rural location reported increased clinical abilities to diagnose and treat health issues common in rural areas as well as greater opportunities for hands-on patient care.


**Next Steps:** WARM has achieved financial stability by capturing 75 percent of participating student tuition, with resources following students to their regional and rural learning communities. Strategic planning in 2011 targeted student recruitment, communications and program outreach. Current educational initiatives, including clerkship opportunities in rural areas, are being evaluated.