

WSU-UW turf war shouldn't get in way of new medical school

By [Editorial Board](#)

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Is Washington state big enough for two publicly funded medical schools?

One would think so, given that Washington's population has almost doubled in the past 35 years, from about 4 million to 7 million.

And there is clearly a need for more well-trained doctors, particularly in rural Eastern Washington.

Yet, early efforts to expand the medical offerings in the Evergreen State seem to be as contentious as the annual Apple Cup football game. Yep, the Dawgs and the Cougars have squared off.

University of Washington officials are critical of a study supporting creation of a new Spokane-based medical school through Washington State University.

The study, according to a UW statement, contained "faulty assumptions, omissions and erroneous data." As a result, the UW said, the feasibility of a WSU medical school is in doubt.

The UW folks might be correct. Then again, the WSU officials could have it right.

At this point, the only thing obvious is that a major turf war is brewing. The Legislature, which decides where state dollars are spent, needs to diffuse this situation sooner rather than later.

To the average Washingtonian, it is unimportant whether the UW has control of two medical schools or WSU controls the new one in Spokane. All that matters to most people is that top-notch medical care is available across the state. In addition, those who are qualified to go to medical school want opportunities in their home state.

The UW offers 120 medical-school slots each year to in-state students. About 900 students are enrolled. According to the study, that is fewer than the 400 or more slots available in states with similar populations.

To complicate matters, a five-state cooperative program — Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana and Idaho — run by the UW serves students in Eastern Washington at the WSU-Spokane campus.

It is easy to see why the UW wants to build on what it has and why WSU would like to see its Spokane campus expand in that area.

The obstacles to success the UW crew points to can probably be worked out, whether it or WSU takes on a Spokane-based medical school.

"The bottom line from my point of view is regardless of everything, they are admitting 120 Washington residents a year," said Myra Hunt, a consultant on the WSU study from Florida State University College of Medicine. "The state of Washington is in dire need of health care professionals."

Let's hope state lawmakers — as well as UW and WSU officials — see it as clearly as a consultant from Florida.