Reviewer's report

Title: The influence of regional branch campuses on medical students' choice of specialty and practice location: a historical cohort study

Version: 1 Date: 1 March 2009

Reviewer: Roger Strasser

Reviewer's report:

I congratulate James Brokaw and colleagues on undertaking the study which has the potential to add to the literature focused on factors which influence specialty choice and practice location, particularly in relation to rural and underserved areas.

Having said that, I believe that this paper requires considerable revisions in order to be accessible to the broad international audience who has an interest in this topic.

First, it cannot be assumed that any readers outside the USA know anything about Indiana, Indianapolis or any of the communities in which the regional campuses are placed. I suggest that the background section should provide a brief description of the State and the socio-demographics of the communities described in the paper.

In addition, I suggest that the introductory section should also clearly specifies that this study is looking at a factor which is somewhat different from variables considered in other studies in the literature which focus on factors that influence choice of primary care specialty and rural/underserved practice location. The novel factor, of course, is location of preclinical/classroom learning. Most studies have focused on location of clinical learning, including in the early years. Such an explanation in the Introduction and also in the Abstract is likely to capture reader attention and to help readers understand the potential importance of this study.

The WWAMI model does include all students undertaking the first year of their medical studies in their home States (equivalent to regional campuses for the University of Washington). I suggest that the authors review the literature and possibly contact the University Washington directly to see if a comparable study has been undertaken there.

I suggest that the Discussion section should distinguish more clearly that the factor being studied is the location of preclinical studies. It seems to me important that the authors provide more information about clinical contacts which happened during those years because they could in fact be confounding variables. This should at least be acknowledged in the section on study limitations.

This paper is methodologically sound and explores a novel factor. In my view, if rewritten around that theme, it is likely to be more readable and potentially
suitable for publication in this journal.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.