



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF
COLLEGES OF OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE



AMERICAN OSTEOPATHIC ASSOCIATION
TREATING OUR FAMILY AND YOURS

July 23, 2009

Dear Senate Finance Committee Member:

On behalf of the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM) and the American Osteopathic Association (AOA), we are writing to request your support for the inclusion of language in the Finance Committee's health reform bill that would facilitate the development of physician training opportunities in community-based settings. Senator Jeff Bingaman has proposed language that would provide Medicare graduate medical education (GME) funding for the development and operation of new or expanded medical residency programs in Teaching Health Centers. These ambulatory care settings, including community health centers, federally qualified health centers, and other non-hospital entities, serve our nation's most at-risk populations. Modernizing primary care training and supporting the funding of such training is critical to the development of the primary care workforce needed to provide all patients with access to care. We support efforts to change the current Medicare statute to meet the training and patient care needs of the 21st Century.

AACOM represents the administrations, faculties, and students of the nation's 25 colleges of osteopathic medicine and three branch campuses that offer the doctor of osteopathic medicine degree. Today, more than 15,500 students, many of whom will practice primary care in rural and underserved areas, are enrolled in osteopathic medical schools. Nearly one in five U.S. medical students is training to be an osteopathic physician, a ratio that is expected to grow to one in four by 2019. The AOA represents the nation's 67,000 osteopathic physicians and is the accrediting entity for the nation's colleges of osteopathic medicine and osteopathic GME programs.

As Congress develops legislation to expand access and coverage for the 47 million uninsured, we must ensure that there is a sufficient supply of primary care physicians to care for those patients. The Medicare Payment Advisory Commission's (MedPAC) June 2008 report recognized that "patient access to high quality primary care is essential for a well-functioning health care delivery system." The MedPAC report recommended that "policy makers should also consider ways to use some of the Medicare subsidies for teaching hospitals to promote primary care. Such efforts in medical training and practice may improve our future supply of primary care clinicians and thus increase beneficiary access to them."

AACOM and the AOA support the Teaching Health Centers provision and believe that GME centered in community-based ambulatory care sites must be the future of primary care. Innovations in delivery, such as the Patient-Centered Medical Home, require innovations in education and training. As our colleges of osteopathic medicine implement innovative teaching methods, the Teaching Health Center, whether sponsored by a community health center or another community-based site, is an innovation that will produce primary care physicians who are essential to meeting our nation's patient care needs.

Thank you for your leadership in the health reform process, and we urge you to support the inclusion of Senator Bingaman's Teaching Health Centers provision in the Finance Committee's health reform bill. AACOM and the AOA believe this is a valuable first step toward improving Medicare by promoting primary care training in community-based entities and ensuring sustained funding for such endeavors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "SC Shannon".

Stephen C. Shannon, DO, MPH
President and CEO
AACOM

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "LAW Wickless DO".

Larry A. Wickless, DO
President
AOA