Merging Allopathic and Osteopathic Graduate Medical Education: Is it Worth It?

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Abstract

In 2011, the ACGME proposed Common Program Requirements that would impede osteopathic residents entering ACGME residency and fellowship programs. These barriers present two problems for the osteopathic profession: 1) the threat of significant migration of osteopathic medical students into allopathic programs; 2) inadequate number of osteopathic residency slots for the all the osteopathic medical students.

There are obvious advantages of a unified ACGME-AOA accreditation system. However, the long term risk of the loss of the osteopathic profession’s distinctiveness and autonomy outweighs the immediate benefit of protecting the few hundred AOA trained residents pursuing allopathic fellowships. ACGME is not preventing new osteopathic medical school graduates from entering their residency programs. In the short run, many osteopathic medical students may choose ACGME residencies to ensure their options in fellowships and that may result in many unfilled AOA positions. However when residency options are limited due to the sheer increase in the number of medical school graduates, osteopathic residency positions will be in very high demand and will likely fill.

My recommendation would be against the merger at this time. Should the ACGME propose to completely limit ACGME training to only MDs, then that would be the time for the osteopathic profession to consider certain concessions and pursue the merger.