

April 16, 2020

Dear Representative/Senator:

On behalf of the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM) and its member institutions and the nation's osteopathic graduate medical education professionals and trainees, thank you for your unrelenting efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic and support the medical community through this crisis. As you work to help alleviate the devastating impacts of the pandemic on the country, we look forward to continuing our work with you and serving as a resource through a new initiative spearheaded by AACOM.

AACOM leads and advocates for the full continuum of osteopathic medical education to improve the health of the public. Founded in 1898 to support and assist the nation's osteopathic medical schools, AACOM represents all 36 accredited colleges of osteopathic medicine—educating nearly 31,000 future physicians, 25 percent of all U.S. medical students—at 57 teaching locations in 33 U.S. states, as well as osteopathic graduate medical education professionals and trainees at U.S. medical centers, hospitals, clinics, and health systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to unfold across the nation and the world, and our teaching hospitals work under unprecedented conditions to address the challenges, such as shortages of trained medical personnel, personal protective equipment (PPE), and supplies critically needed to assure delivery of patient care. On March 16, AACOM called upon its member institutions to institute a 'pause' in medical student clinical education activities intended to allow our COM leaders, clinical faculty, and hospital partners the opportunity to find a meaningful way forward at this unprecedented time. The message was jointly issued by AACOM and the Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation (COCA) and developed in close communication with our colleagues at the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC). This week, we recommended, depending upon local conditions and responses that may already be in place, that the pause continue at a minimum for an additional three weeks.

Simultaneously, the non-COVID-19-related health care needs of millions of Americans still need to be met. Thousands of students across the health professions will have an opportunity to answer that call through a new initiative spearheaded by AACOM: [Students Assist America](#).

Medical students and students from a variety of other health professions are being deployed in safe, clinically appropriate ways to help the nation's health care system continue to function during this unprecedented pandemic. With a focus on students who have completed the majority or all of their clinical education, future physicians, physician assistants, nurses, social workers, public health experts and others have joined together as an interdisciplinary safety net to ensure that the weight of the COVID-19 emergency does not crush the daily operations of the health care system and put individuals and communities at further risk.

7700 Old Georgetown Road  
Suite 250  
Bethesda, MD 20814  
P 401.968.4100  
[www.aacom.org](http://www.aacom.org)

500 New Jersey Avenue, NW  
Suite 380  
Washington, DC 20001-2005  
P 202.844.4217  
[www.aacom.org](http://www.aacom.org)

Students will only be assigned to health care settings where patient safety and their own personal health can be assured with proper supervision and the use of remote technologies. Working with institutions such as local hospitals, Departments of Health and Medical Reserve Corps units, these students will supplement the public health network to address the COVID-19 response, and provide care matched to their education level and expertise. Core services could include chronic disease management; screenings; wound care; telehealth visits; mental health support and other assistance depending on the state and local need. The goal is to protect the public health by relieving the burden on medical staff who must focus on the specialized treatment for acute respiratory illness associated with COVID-19.

[A model approach enabled by the Students Assist America collaboration](#) recently launched in Ohio. Through a joint effort of Governor Mike DeWine, the Ohio University Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine and the Ohio Department of Health, and with implementation help from the Ohio National Guard, the Ohio Medical Reserve Corps, the Ohio Association of Community Health Centers and the Ohio Association of Health Commissioners, the college's entire 3<sup>rd</sup> year class of 250 students will deploy to local health agencies starting April 13.

In virtual class and online settings, students will receive immediate training in key areas such as general knowledge of COVID-19, appropriate use of personal protective equipment, quarantine, social distancing, and public health topics such as clinician wellness, epidemic preparedness, messaging and containment.

On behalf of our member institutions and the nation's osteopathic graduate medical education professionals and trainees, thank you again for your support addressing the coronavirus pandemic. We look forward to continuing our work with you and for the opportunity to serve as a resource to your district/state through Students Assist America during this crisis. For additional information, please contact Mary-Lynn Bender, Interim Vice President of Government and Public Relations, at [mlbender@aacom.org](mailto:mlbender@aacom.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert A. Cain, DO". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a light gray rectangular box.

Robert A. Cain, DO, FACOI, FAODME  
President and CEO