

July 7, 2011

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM) and the American Osteopathic Association (AOA), which represents the nation's 26 colleges of osteopathic medicine, offering the doctor of osteopathic medicine (DO) degree at 34 locations in 26 states and the nation's 78,000 osteopathic physicians respectively, ***we respectfully urge you to protect graduate medical education (GME) and oppose any potential funding cuts to GME.***

We understand the dire fiscal situation our nation is facing and the hard choices that need to be made to return this country to sound fiscal footing. Furthermore, we understand the important fiscal concerns that must be addressed. However, as Congress and the White House continue the federal budget and deficit negotiations, we understand that severe cuts to GME are currently under consideration. As you know, Medicare funding provides the principal financial resource for the training of medical residents. Reducing this funding in any way will have a detrimental impact on hospitals with teaching programs for physician residents. These programs currently receive approximately \$9.5 billion annually, which is used to fund an insufficient number of residency slots each year. Cutting funding for GME programs would result in fewer future physicians being trained and, as a result, fewer patients being treated. Evidence shows that because residents often begin their medical careers in a geographical location near where they trained, fewer local physician residents could result in fewer local primary care physicians.

Today, more than 19,000 students are enrolled in osteopathic medical schools. Nearly one in five U.S. medical students is training to be an osteopathic physician. It is important to note that over 60 percent of all osteopathic physicians practice in a primary care specialty and many current osteopathic medical students will pursue careers in primary care. Many will practice in rural and underserved areas; the areas that already face shortages of primary care providers. The number of osteopathic medical school graduates is growing and is expected to continue to rise in response to physician workforce shortages that exist and are projected to increase over the next five to 15 years. Appropriate GME funding is essential to the training of primary care and all other physicians. Reducing this vital funding would be devastating to the patients these physicians serve and to the entire health care system.

A variety of factors are driving the need for greater numbers of physicians to serve the nation's public — current and projected physician workforce shortages; 32 million newly insured individuals resulting directly from the Affordable Care Act; an aging population and a concomitant rise in the incidence of chronic disease; and new models of care aimed at providing more accessible, more affordable care to more Americans. To meet these challenges, we need more, not less, future physicians in training.

As Congress continues its negotiations, AACOM and the AOA are willing and ready to work with Congress to find fiscally responsible ways to reduce our nation's deficit. We urge you to support the

training of future osteopathic physicians and the health care system they serve by protecting GME and opposing any cuts to this vital funding. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter.

Respectfully,

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

Stephen C. Shannon, D.O., M.P.H.  
President and CEO  
American Association of Colleges of  
Osteopathic Medicine

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karen J. Nichols, D.O.".

Karen J. Nichols, D.O.  
President  
American Osteopathic Association