

**2017 Assessment of Osteopathic Medical Education and Academic Affiliations with the U.S.
Department of Veterans Affairs**

June 29, 2017

Background

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) [Office of Academic Affiliations \(OAA\)](#) has partnered with medical schools, residency programs, and institutions in academic affiliations for over 70 years. These partnerships have resulted in academic affiliation agreements with most of the colleges of osteopathic medicine (COMs) and several osteopathic graduate medical education (GME) partners.

The American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM) strongly supports the expansion and sustainability of GME positions created by the *Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014* (VACAA), which authorized the VA to establish 1,500 medical residency positions over five years beginning with the 2015-2016 academic year. In 2016, this provision of the law was extended, allowing 10 years (through 2024) for the VA to establish these residency positions.

AACOM works closely with the OAA to [inform and engage](#) the osteopathic medical education (OME) community about opportunities to partner with the VA on clinical training programs for osteopathic medical students as well as to increase the number of osteopathic GME positions awarded through VACAA. To further support this effort, in 2016, AACOM established its OME & VA Academic Affiliations Task Force, comprised of individuals who currently oversee affiliation agreements between the COMs and the VA, are involved in establishing or managing relationships with the VA through an Osteopathic Postdoctoral Training Institution (OPTI), or are deans, clinical directors, program directors, and/or directors of medical education at the COMs. The Task Force serves as a liaison between the OME community and the VA and works to develop recommendations on ways to build, strengthen, and expand academic partnerships with the VA.

AACOM's 2017 OME & VA Academic Affiliations Survey

In May 2017, AACOM conducted a survey to assess the OME community's level of engagement and needs as it relates to academic partnerships with the VA. In addition, per a March 2017 [letter](#), VA Secretary David Shulkin contacted AACOM as a VA academic partner to solicit ideas about ways to improve academic partnerships and how to address barriers and policies that often create challenges for these partnerships.

The information collected is intended to inform AACOM as it continues to advance and support academic affiliations between the VA and OME community. Responses were also used to inform AACOM's response to Secretary Shulkin.

Methodology

The survey was jointly prepared and administered by the AACOM Office of Medical Education and Research and the Office of Government Relations. Half of the osteopathic medical schools

responded, with additional responses received from members of OPTIs, members of the Association of Osteopathic Directors and Medical Educators, members of ACGME-accredited sponsoring institutions, and directors of residency specialty programs. The survey included a referral process to ensure accurate responses were obtained from the primary contact overseeing VA academic affiliations, as well as to prevent duplicate responses from the same organization or institution.

Survey Key Findings

- Nearly 60 percent of respondents were from representatives from the COMs. Other respondents were representatives of OPTIs, ACGME-accredited sponsoring institutions, and a residency specialty program.
- While more than 90 percent of respondents expressed interest in expanding GME positions with the VA, approximately 80 percent indicated interest in expanding medical student clinical rotation experiences during the third and fourth years of medical school. Respondents were also seeking opportunities to expand fellowship positions and collaborate on faculty sharing with the VA.
- Of the respondents, about 70 percent are not currently affiliated with a VACAA GME program. However, more than 75 percent of respondents would like to be contacted directly by the VA to explore adding VACAA GME positions. AACOM will serve as a liaison between the OME community and the VA to help facilitate this process.
- All respondents believe that the VA would benefit from looking at outcomes from historic academic medical center training programs/relationships compared to smaller/newer community-based (often-osteopathic) programs.
- Based on Secretary Shulkin’s request for information, respondents indicated that the following areas are the most challenging when developing academic affiliation relationships with the VA:
 - Contracting timelines;
 - Lack of incentives for teaching for VA employees;
 - Limitation of support per-resident FTE to time spent at VA facilities;
 - Sole source contracting processes; and
 - Credentialing and privileging process for shared and volunteer faculty.

Feedback Received from AACOM’s OME & VA Task Force and Strategic Outreach

AACOM has confirmed that of the nation’s 33 osteopathic medical schools, 29 of the COMs have academic affiliation agreements with the VA. AACOM will continue to serve as a liaison to increase this number and ensure the COMs connect with appropriate VA staff to establish these partnerships. According to AACOM’s strategic outreach and Task Force discussions, the following highlights areas of opportunity to improve and enhance academic partnerships with the VA.

- Improve communication and coordination: OME partners frequently experience challenges connecting with appropriate VA personnel to initiate academic partnerships. This has often led to a breakdown of communication and might prevent the partnership from initially forming.
- Designate a “local” VA advocate: An advocate within the VA system, someone who is employed by the VA facility where an institution is seeking to establish an affiliation and who can provide on-the-ground support, is critical to ensure rotations are available and is needed to help guide

OME partners through the process to complete the necessary administrative and documentation requirements.

- Increase education on VA opportunities: More specifics are needed on the undergraduate medical education opportunities available at the VA. Additionally, increased promotion is needed of the VACAA GME expansion initiative. AACOM is willing and ready to serve as a liaison to facilitate this process.
- Streamline the affiliation agreement process: AACOM recognizes the need for proper oversight and approval of academic affiliation agreements; however, the VA should work to streamline this process to help eliminate lengthy timelines and improve coordination with its affiliates.
- VA as a sponsoring institution: The VA should explore developing and sponsoring GME programs and have a mechanism in place whereby COM faculty are appropriately credentialed to supervise and/or engage in clinical care at a VA facility.
- Partial continuity clinic: There is often confusion about whether a partial continuity clinic is permissible to meet accreditation requirements. Further education by the VA is needed to clarify this issue. It is recommended that the VA formalize its policy and provide official language to address any misunderstanding between the local and national levels.
- Partnering with community-based sites: Although AACOM has received feedback that the VA is eager to partner with community-based sites, there is an information gap on how to create partnerships that will meet accreditation requirements.
- COM Faculty Needs at the VA: The COMs often face challenges when clinical faculty appointments are split across multiple VA facilities. The VA should explore ways to address this issue while meeting VA requirements in providing specialty care at multiple VA locations.

Contact Information:

Please contact VA_GME@aacom.org if you have any questions about this assessment or the survey. To learn more about AACOM's efforts to inform and engage the OME community about opportunities to partner with the VA, please view [AACOM's VA GME webpage](#).