

December 22, 2020

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Herbert C. Hoover Building
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear President-Elect Biden:

Congratulations on your election as the 46th President of the United States. On behalf of the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM), its member institutions and the nation's osteopathic graduate medical education (GME) professionals and trainees, I write to highlight the important role osteopathic medical education (OME) plays in the fabric of our nation's healthcare system.

AACOM leads and advocates for the full continuum of OME to improve the health of the public. Founded in 1898 to support and assist the nation's osteopathic medical schools, AACOM represents all 37 accredited colleges of osteopathic medicine (COMs). Osteopathic medical schools currently educate nearly 31,000 physicians —25 percent of all US medical students—at 58 teaching locations in 33 US states, as well as osteopathic GME professionals and trainees at US medical centers, hospitals, clinics and health systems. Osteopathic medicine is a growing field. During the current application cycle, which remains open for several months, AACOM has received more than 24,000 applications to osteopathic medical school, representing an 18.2 percent increase compared to this time last year and already eclipsing the entire number of applicants from last cycle.¹

As you know, the country faces a dire physician shortage, especially of primary care doctors, who are essential to identifying, treating, and preventing disease, and who serve as patients' first healthcare point of contact. Many osteopathic medical students choose to actively pursue careers in primary care, strengthening the backbone of our nation's healthcare system. This year, according to the 2020 National Resident Matching Program, 55 percent of total osteopathic seniors matched to primary care specialties of family medicine, internal medicine and pediatrics.²

OME also has a proven history of establishing educational programs for medical students and residents that target the healthcare needs of rural and underserved populations. With health disparities on the rise, and worsening because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are proud to help make healthcare access more equitable for all of our country's patients and communities. In fact, AACOM data show that 50 percent of incoming 2019-2020 osteopathic medical students plan to practice in a medically underserved or health shortage area; of those, 46 percent plan to practice in a rural community.³

¹ <https://www.aacom.org/news-and-events/news-detail/2020/11/16/applications-to-osteopathic-medical-schools-hit-all-time-high>

² https://mk0nrmp3oyqui6wqfm.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/MM_Results_and-Data_2020-1.pdf

³ https://www.aacom.org/docs/default-source/data-and-trends/aacom-2019-2020-academic-year-entering-student-survey-summary-report.pdf?sfvrsn=f2380f97_4

The OME community is also on the front lines of the battle against COVID-19. Osteopathic medical educators and students are serving as first responders in medical facilities across the country and helping to treat COVID patients. To further engage medical and other health professions' students in the pandemic response, AACOM is spearheading Students Assist America⁴, an interprofessional collaborative of 11 associations representing academic health institutions across the country. Additionally, COMs have pivoted to safely adapt clinical education and training curricula to the COVID-impacted learning environment to safeguard the future physician workforce.

As we move into the new year, AACOM and the OME community stand ready to work closely with the Biden Administration to strengthen and modernize the healthcare system. We encourage robust policies that foster OME and the training of osteopathic physicians, including investing in federally funded GME, supporting federal financial aid programs and enhancing research opportunities for osteopathic institutions. Additionally, we welcome the opportunity to directly support the administration and strongly encourage you to consider appointing osteopathic experts to federal leadership positions and government advisory boards, committees, commissions, councils and other decision-making bodies. Osteopathic physicians focus on treating the whole person and receive 200 hours of training in osteopathic manipulative medicine, a hands-on treatment used to diagnose and treat illness and injury, in addition to a standard medical education curriculum, giving us a unique voice and perspective in the medical community.

Again, we look forward to working together to improve healthcare for all patients nationwide. If you have any questions or require further information, please contact David Bergman, Vice President of Government Relations, at dbergman@aacom.org.

Sincerely,



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

⁴ <https://www.aacom.org/mobilize>