

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER
The College of Medicine

Dear Colleagues,

June 2, 2009

On Friday of last week we graduated the medical school class of 2009, 137 MDs, and graduate students mentored by COM faculty, 11 PhDs. Three things struck me during that exercise. First, and impossible to miss, the students were beaming with their accomplishments and eager to move to the next step. It simultaneously makes you smile and feel your age. Second, their board scores, post-grad placements, and publications confirm they are well prepared for the next step. Third, we must continue to offer the highest quality of education. I believe to do that we need to continually update what we teach and how we teach it.

Thus, I would like to focus on the progress and future plans for our education mission in this column. There are clear, achievable tasks we must meet to be a top quartile education institution.

Medical Students: The performance of our students on boards, as measured by first time pass rate and overall pass rate, is excellent. However, I would like to see an increase in our average scores, now at the national mean. In addition, during our recent reaccreditation by LCME they noted that despite our strong student performance our curriculum is very traditional and a revision is needed by our next review in 2013-14. A newly formed Curriculum Revision Taskforce and a number of departments have taken the lead in this revision. Anatomy and Neurobiology has planned changes in Medical Anatomy which reduce lecture/lab hours and increase clinical correlations. Neurology has reorganized Clinical Neuroscience to offer a significant number of prerecorded teaching sessions and taken active learning with case vignettes to the next level. Pathology has successfully combined podcast lectures with subsequent small group discussion in General Pathology.

Surveys completed by residency directors throughout the country indicate our past medical students are arriving with the necessary basic skill set. However, to insure this continues to be the case, we have invested and are continuing to invest in basic simulators for our Kaplan Clinical Skill Center, and plan to increase/more fully utilize Objective Structured Clinical Exams (OSCEs; test of clinical skills using standardized patients). Thus we plan a large push in use of standardized patients as teaching and testing tools and in clinical simulation to prepare our students. This will be in addition to the standard bedside training they receive.

Class size will increase this fall from 150 to 165 students. This increase begins to address the concern expressed by our state and medical organizations that we need to graduate more physicians. Further, it is timely in that it will provide added revenue to help meet financial needs, but occurs while we have stimulus money to pay one-time costs associated with class expansion. This class expansion also occurs at a time when we have a strong applicant pool. We do not anticipate expansion beyond 165 students without a major change in state appropriation

Graduate Medical Education (GME): Our residency and fellowship programs continue to score well during reaccreditation and be one of our major accomplishments. This year's resident match may have been our best ever. Our three campus system allows us to provide a substantial depth and breadth of offerings with an approximate ratio of two residents and fellows for each student. However, we need to continue to expand GME across all three campuses. Specifically we are in varying states of discussion-implementation to begin programs in advanced certification cardiology, and anesthesiology on the Memphis campus while we seek expanded programs in critical care and oncology in Knoxville, and cardiology and other programs in Chattanooga. In addition, advanced training simulators and a

dedicated advanced simulation center is in the works for the Memphis campus. Our Knoxville and Chattanooga campuses already have the benefits of advanced training simulation.

Graduate Students: We have an ongoing search for an Associate Dean of Graduate Studies. This dean will lead us in reshaping the graduate programs associated with COM to address concerns of students and faculty.

Retention & Support of Educators: Key to our education mission is our educators. However, we need to make sure educators have sufficient release time to do a good job. In this regard the upcoming annual review is an opportunity to discuss distribution of effort with your Chair. Further, we need to insure the compensation we offer is competitive for those who are primarily educators. As such, I have asked Associate Deans to do a salary analysis comparing us to national norms for medical educators. From that, we can plan accordingly.

In my comments during Convocation on Friday I challenged the students to recognize they must become life-long-learners. I believe we are doing a fine job with our education mission, but I challenge us to recognize there are both housekeeping and innovative strategies that can be implemented to further improve the quality of education we offer. In this key endeavor, one of our core missions, we are rapidly closing on top quartile status.

I welcome your suggestions and comments regarding our education mission.

Steve J Schwab, MD

Executive Dean, College of Medicine

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The e-mail address to send in concerns and suggestions to Dr Schwab is COM@utm.edu.