

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
National Academic Affiliations Council (NAAC)
Meeting Minutes for September 25-26, 2024**

**New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVAHCS)
Performance Improvement Conference Room, 4A-160
1501 San Pedro Dr. SE
Albuquerque, NM 87108**

The National Academic Affiliations Council met in-person on September 25 and 26, 2024 at the New Mexico VA Health Care Systems (NMVAHCS). A quorum was present, affording the Council the opportunity to conduct normal business.

Attendance: See Appendix

Day 1: Wednesday, September 25, 2024

Welcome, Announcements, and Introduction of Members

Ms. Mitchell called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. and provided administrative updates.

Dr. Bowman welcomed members to the meeting and provided the opportunity for members to introduce themselves. She noted that Dr. Hildreth, NAAC Chair, would arrive late to the meeting due to weather delays. Dr. German, NAAC Vice Chair, added that she was unable to travel because of Hurricane Helene but would participate virtually.

Dr. Bowman expressed gratitude for the Council's dedication to VA's education mission emphasizing the importance of continued collaboration between VA and its academic partners to ensure the highest quality training for future health care professionals.

New Mexico VA Health Care System Education Overview

Annette Brooks, PhD, Deputy Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for Education, NMVAHCS, presented an overview of the NMVAHCS's health professions trainee (HPT) program, highlighting its significant contributions to the development of future health care professionals. The program encompasses a wide range of educational services, including library services, tuition assistance, and career development. The System also offers education for 125 full-time physician resident, 55 paid associate health trainee, and as well as 42 additional in other medical education programs. These programs involved over 200 current affiliation agreements with academic organizations. There are currently 110 health professions trainees enrolled in the HPT program.

The program has increased its graduate medical education (GME) positions in recent years, including new residency positions in ophthalmology, psychology, plastic surgery,

and brain injury. It focuses on interprofessional education through clinical team training and simulation programs. Dr. Brooks discussed challenges related to personal identity verification (PIV) cards and opportunities for growth in interprofessional training.

VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network Overview (VISN 22) and New Mexico VA Facility Overview

Gurujot Khalsa, MD, Chief of Staff, NMVAHCS, provided an overview of the Desert Pacific Healthcare Network (VISN 22), which encompasses New Mexico, Arizona, and southern California. The network includes eight major medical centers, 79 community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs), and 31 Vet Centers. It serves 1.5 million Veterans and employs 31,000 staff. The network faces challenges in recruiting health care professionals due to its rural location. However, it also offers unique opportunities for education and career development.

VISN 22 boasts a centralized hub for Veteran care coordination and tele-emergency services and specialized programs including spinal cord injury, mental health, women's health, and geriatrics. Dr. Khalsa highlighted VA's commitment to providing high-quality care and meeting the needs of Veterans in rural areas. He also emphasized the importance of innovation and collaboration in delivering effective health care services.

New Mexico VA Health Care System Associate Chief of Staff for Research Overview & Biomedical Research Institute of New Mexico (BRINM) Overview

Brent Wagner, MD, FASN, FACP, Director, Kidney Institute of New Mexico, Professor of Medicine, Division of Nephrology, University of New Mexico (UNM) Health Science Center, ACOS of the Research & Development Service, Staff Physician, Medicine Section, NMVAHCS, presented his team and its research activities and discussed the importance of Veteran-centric research and collaboration with UNM. Dr. Wagner emphasized success in securing funding for COVID-19 vaccine trials. He highlighted collaborations with UNM faculty and participation in national research programs.

He discussed the Biomedical Research Institute of New Mexico (BRINM), a non-profit organization, and its importance in managing research grants from various sources outside the VA. BRINM supports research activities, hires research personnel, and secures sponsorships. A brief discussion touched upon BRINM's involvement in educational initiatives. Examples include training programs for behavioral health providers and pharmacy students.

Members inquired about opportunities for residents and medical students to participate in research. Dr. Wagner emphasized BRINM's role in engaging students early and highlighted the importance of research experience for medical careers. A discussion on the balance between research and education for non-profit organizations like BRINM emerged. Examples of BRINM's educational projects include training programs for health care professionals. Dr. Wagner confirmed the presence of a nurse scientist and interdisciplinary research efforts. He emphasized VA's commitment to cutting-edge

research, collaboration, translating research into improved veteran health outcomes, and training future health care professionals.

Farewell to NAAC Members Rotating Off the Council

Dr. Bowman acknowledged the departure of several rotating NAAC members and expressed gratitude for their contributions to the NAAC.

Dr. Hildreth, NAAC Chair, announced his departure from the council and expressed his enjoyment of being a part of the group. He thanked the departing members: Susan Bakewell-Sachs, Kelly Ragucci, and Maga Jackson-Triche.

OAA Public Affairs Product Showcase

Cheryl Whitney, Public Affairs Specialist, OAA, presented recent videos highlighting health professions education successes within VA facilities. The videos focused on various aspects of health professions education, including dental internships, mini-grants for innovative programs, and onboarding processes. OAA's target audience includes designated education officers (DEOs), residents, facilities, and Veterans. The videos are distributed through VA News, VA YouTube channels, and VA social media platforms. Ms. Whitney shared how OAA's public affairs team works to promote health professions education through storytelling and media engagement and discussed some of the challenges the team faces related to social media presence and resource allocation.

Members discussed the importance of social media for reaching a wider audience and promoting health professions education. The council emphasized the need for a clear and compelling message to promote health professions education.

MISSION ACT, Section 403 Updates

Kanta Velamuri, MD, M.Ed., Chief of Health Professions Education, OAA, provided an update on the implementation of the MISSION Act, Section 403, which established a pilot program for GME and residency. One of the MISSION Act's aims is to improve access to health care for Veterans by expanding GME opportunities in underserved areas. The pilot program involves reimbursement for resident stipends and benefits, as well as startup costs for residency programs in non-VA facilities. Covered facilities include those operated by Indian Health Service, Indian tribes or tribal organizations, or located in underserved areas. Dr. Velamuri discussed the complexity of implementation due to new authorities and congressional reporting requirements.

Members discussed challenges related to funding, time constraints, and the complexity of the program. They suggested extending the funding period and simplifying the application process.

Working Lunch in Conference Room/Continued Discussions

The Council discussed the creation of OAA social media accounts to enhance its communication efforts and promote health professions education. Members expressed how social media is essential for reaching a wider audience, particularly young people and medical students, and how it can help showcase VA's education programs, attract trainees, and foster collaboration with academic partners. The discussion touched on potential challenges, such as resource allocation and the need for dedicated staff to manage social media accounts.

Clinical Educator Protected Time for Teaching Subcommittee Update

Timothy J. Kowalski, D.O., D.FACN, Vice Dean for Professional and Public Relations, Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine, Chair, Clinician Educator Protected Time for Teaching Subcommittee (CEPTTS), discussed the challenges of defining and implementing protected time for clinical educators. The primary challenge is the lack of a clear definition for protected time and its impact on labor mapping and clinical productivity. Furthermore, implementing changes to the definition of protected time would require significant funding, which is currently constrained.

Dr. Anthony Stazzone suggested that CEPTTS develop a clear definition of protected time that accounts for non-encounter-based supervision activities, which NAAC could then recommend to the Secretary. Dr. Kowalski agreed that working on that recommendation was a good next step for the subcommittee. Dr. Stazzone agreed to join the subcommittee on an ad hoc basis.

Southwest Tribal Veterans Program Overview

Terry Obago, Health Systems Specialist, Native American Program Overview Coordinator, NMVAHCS, presented his work in increasing access to VA health care for Native American and Alaska Native veterans including outreach to tribal communities, establishing relationships, and informing veterans about VA health care services. He stated that mistrust of the federal government and limited resources in tribal communities are significant barriers. Mr. Obago has successfully enrolled Veterans in VA health care and provided support services, including suicide prevention and cultural programs.

Mr. Obago shared that NMVAHCS is reopening a sweat lodge program to provide spiritual healing for Veterans. He discussed goals to expand outreach efforts and collaboration with tribal communities to address their health care needs. Members discussed the importance of culturally sensitive care and the need for more Native American health care providers.

Cooperative Studies Program Overview

Todd Conner, Pharm.D., Director, Cooperative Studies Program Clinical Research Pharmacy Coordinating Center, NMVAHCS, presented an overview of the VA Cooperative Studies Program, a national network dedicated to conducting clinical trials. The program aims to conduct large-scale clinical trials to improve patient care within VA. It covers various medical areas, including cardiovascular, diabetes, surgery, and mental health and provides comprehensive support for clinical trials, including study design, drug manufacturing, data management, and safety monitoring.

The program collaborates with academic institutions, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Department of Defense (DOD), and pharmaceutical companies. It offers training opportunities for students and fellows through rotations and fellowships. It maintains a large biorepository of samples for research purposes. Members discussed the program's significance in conducting vital research and improving patient care.

Internal Medicine Chief Residents Panel Discussion

Annette Brooks, PhD, Deputy ACOS for Education, NMVAHCS, introduced the panel topic and panel guests. The panel of residents discussed their experiences training at VA, highlighting both strengths and challenges. They appreciated the ability to follow patients throughout their treatment, leading to a deeper understanding of their health conditions. They discussed how VA provides exposure to a wide range of patient demographics and medical conditions and offers access to various resources and specialties, allowing for comprehensive patient care. Residents valued the opportunity to work with different health care professionals, fostering a team-based approach to care.

Residents expressed frustration with the electronic medical record (EMR) system, particularly its search functionality and complexity. The pager system can be overwhelming and time-consuming, and panelists suggested that it be enhanced to provide clearer communication and reduce workload. Some residents noted a lack of exposure to women's health services, which could be limiting for those pursuing primary care.

The NAAC members responded favorably to the panelists' remarks. Members noted that some of the issues, such as the pager system, are location-specific and not the result of national policy and called for informal feedback rather than a formal recommendation.

Diversity in the Healthcare Workforce Subcommittee (DHWS) Update

Susan Bakewell-Sachs, PhD, RN, FAAN, Vice President for Nursing Affairs and Dean, Oregon Health and Science University School of Nursing, DHWS Co-Chair, noted that Dr. Henderson, DHWS Co-Chair, was not able to attend the meeting. She provided an update on the activities and accomplishments of the subcommittee over the past year.

The subcommittee received briefings on the VHA Scholarship and Clinical Education Programs, Health Professions Scholarship Program (HPSP), and Specialty Education Loan Repayment Program (SELRP), which help increase diversity in the VA health care workforce. It addressed the STRONG Veterans Act, which authorizes VA to expand health professions trainee slots.

Dr. Bakewell-Sachs shared that the subcommittee has been renewed for another two years and that the Veterans Healing Veterans Scholarship Program has transitioned from a pilot into a permanent program. She discussed the significant progress OAA has made towards achieving the goal of expanding health professions trainee slots and stressed that the subcommittee will continue to focus on recruiting diverse and underrepresented individuals into the health care workforce. It will explore strategies to achieve their goals in light of the Supreme Court's recent affirmative action decision.

Strategic Academic Advisory Council (SAAC) Update

Anthony Stazzone, MD, MBA, FACP, Chief Medical Officer, MidSouth Healthcare Network (VISN 19), provided an update on the SAAC activities and accomplishments highlighting the work to standardize staffing models and processes for health professional trainees across VA medical centers. The hiring slowdown due to budget constraints negatively impacted the onboarding of health professional trainees. VA did not provide clear guidance on excluding trainees from full time equivalent (FTE) calculations, leading to confusion and further negative impacts.

Members discussed a recommendation establishing clear guidance that hiring slowdowns do not affect the onboarding of HPTs.

Council Discussion and Recommendations

Dr. Hildreth discussed three topics as recommendations for Secretary consideration:

- **In support of one of the VA's four pillars, the NAAC recommends the creation of OAA social media accounts on major platforms and additional resources to highlight VA's health professions education. This would inform the public on the value of VA education programs in providing well trained health care professionals for VA and the nation, assist with the recruitment of future health care professionals for the VA and the nation, accelerate educational innovations in and across the VA, and enhance partnerships with academic affiliates.**
- **The NAAC recommends that VA paid health professions trainees (HPTs) be excluded from full time equivalent (FTE) caps. The NAAC further recommends formal written guidance excluding HPTs from FTE caps to be created and disseminated across VA leadership and stakeholders to ensure the VA statutory education mission is met.**
- **In addition to the previous SECVA approved recommendation from March 2023, the NAAC strongly recommends that non-US Citizen health professions trainees (HPTs) are fully prepared to care for Veterans and**

begin learning on day one of and throughout their VA educational experience. To that end, the VA Offices of Information Technology, Personnel Security, Workforce Management and Consulting and the Electronic Health Record Modernization Integration Office must make certain that non-US Citizen HPTs are onboarded promptly and accurately and receive timely access to the Veteran's health record.

Recommendations received vocal support by council members present.

Members noted that since Dr. Bakewell-Sachs is rotating off the NAAC, the Diversity in the Healthcare Workforce Subcommittee will need a new co-chair. Staff pointed out that NAAC members can recommend individuals both for the NAAC and subcommittees. Subcommittees can include non-NAAC members, but only a NAAC member can serve as chair or co-chair. New NAAC members will be on board for the December meeting.

Public Comments

There were no public comments.

Final Comments and Adjournment

Dr. Hildreth thanked the staff for organizing the meeting and the members for attending. There being no other comments, he adjourned the meeting at 4:35 p.m.

Prepared By: Nellie Mitchell, Designated Federal Office, NAAC

Verified By: /s/ James E.K. Hildreth, PhD, MD, Chairman, NAAC
Date: December 19, 2024

Appendix: Attendance Records

Council Member Attendance

Susan Bakewell-Sachs, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, Vice President for Nursing Affairs and Dean, Oregon Health and Science University School of Nursing; Marjorie A. Bowman, MD, MPA (Ex-Officio), Chief Academic Affiliations Officer, Office of Academic Affiliations; Deborah German, MD, Vice President for Health Affairs, Founding Dean, UCF College of Medicine; James E. K. Hildreth, PhD, MD, (Chair), President and Chief Executive Officer, Department of Internal Medicine, Meharry Medical College; Timothy Kowalski, DO, D. FRACN, Vice Provost for Professional and Public Relations, American Osteopathic Association; Christopher Robinson, MS, MBA, CPO, ATC, FAAOP (D), Clinical Resource Director, The National Commission on Orthotic & Prosthetic Education, Assistant Professor of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Northwestern University's Prosthetics Orthotics Center; Olga Rodriguez de Arzola, MD, FAAP, Dean of the School of Medicine, Ponce Health Sciences University; Anthony Stazzone, MD, MBA, FACP, Chief Medical Officer, MidSouth Healthcare Network (VISN 19); Alison Whelan, MD, Chief Academic Officer, Association of American Medical Colleges

Council members unable to attend:

Loretta Christensen, MD, MBA, MSJ, FACS (Ex-Officio) Chief Medical Officer, Indian Health Services; Eric Elster, MD, FACS, FRCSEng (Hon.), (Ex-Officio), CAPT, MC, USN (Ret.), Dean, School of Medicine, Professor of Surgery, Uniformed Services University; Arthur Evans, Jr., PhD, Chief Executive Officer and Executive Vice President, American Psychological Association; David Henderson, MD, Vice President for Equity, Diversity and Belonging, Medical Education, American Medical Association; Maga Jackson-Triche, MD, MSHS, Assistant Vice Chancellor and Health Executive Advisor for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), University of California San Francisco; Meredith Kazer, PhD, CNL, APRN, A/GNP-BC, FAAN, Professor and Dean, Marion Peckham Egan School of Nursing and Health Studies; Ryan Lilly, MPA, (Ex-Officio), Network Director, VA New England Healthcare System, Veterans Health Administration; Christopher Loyke, DO, FACOFP, Dean and Chief Academic Officer, Lincoln Memorial University - DeBusk College of Osteopathic Medicine (LMU-DCOM); Thomas O'Toole, MD, Deputy Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Clinical Services, Quality and Field Operations, VA; Kelly R. Ragucci, PharmD, FCCP, BCPS, Vice President, Professional Development, American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP).

VHA Staff attending (all are OAA staff unless specified otherwise):

David Baron, MD, Internal Medicine Chief Resident, NMVAHCS; Magdalena Bomgardner, MD, Internal Medicine Chief Resident, NMVAHCS; Annette Brooks, PhD, Deputy Associate Chief of Staff for Education, NMVAHCS; John M. Byrne, DO, FACP, Senior Advisor; Robert Cannon, DO, Internal Medicine Chief Resident, NMVAHCS; Todd Conner, Pharm.D., Director, Cooperative Studies Program Clinical Research Pharmacy Coordinating Center, NMVAHCS; Nataly Echevarria, MD, Internal Medicine Chief Resident; Larissa A. Emory, PMP, CBP, MS, Management and Program Analyst (Alternate Designated Federal Officer for the NAAC); Jeannie Howard, Management Analyst; Ramona Joyce, Executive Officer; Gurujot Khalsa, MD, Chief of Staff, NMVAHCS; Nellie Mitchell, MS, RHIA, Program Analyst (Designated Federal Officer for the NAAC); Terry Obago, Health Systems Specialist, Native American Program Overview Coordinator, NMVAHCS; Nishith Sripathi, MD, Internal Medicine Chief Resident, NMVAHCS; Ezgi Tiryaki, MD, FAAN, ACC, Deputy Chief Academic Affiliations Officer; Kanta Velamuri, MD, M.Ed., Chief of Health Professions Education; Brent Wagner, MD, FASN, FACP, Director, Kidney Institute of New Mexico, Professor of Medicine, Division of Nephrology, UNM Health Science Center, ACOS of the Research & Development Service, Staff Physician, Medicine Section, NMVAHCS; Cheryl Whitney, Public Affairs Specialist.

Members of the Public attending:

No members of the public were in attendance.