

New & noteworthy

Updates on activities in the profession

AACOM posts clinical research database

Until relatively recently, research efforts—whether clinical, medical education, health policy, or outcomes studies—have not held prominent roles in the development of the osteopathic medical profession. One reason for this is that most osteopathic physicians have not been educated in the same culture of research that is enjoyed by their allopathic counterparts.

Evidence of such a disparity can be found in the research expenditures of the colleges of osteopathic medicine. As late as 1998, for example, research expenditures at public colleges of osteopathic medicine amounted to approximately 6.9% of total budgets, while in private osteopathic medical schools that number was 1.6%. Research allocation was 25.5% at publicly assisted allopathic medical schools and 32.3% at allopathic private schools.

This dearth of research endeavors in the osteopathic profession contrasts markedly with the dramatic expansion of funding resources, particularly in the federal government. The National Institutes of Health (NIH), for example, continue to receive huge appropriations increases, and such increases are consistent with the US Congress' goal to double the research budget between fiscal years 1998 and 2003.

But the profession is not ignoring the research problem. Participants in the first Osteopathic Collaborative Clinical Trials Initiative Conference, held in December 1999, discussed how to effect a "culture" change in the profession with regard to interest in and commitment to research. They agreed that to do so, researchers—regardless of whether they are based at osteopathic institutions—must engage in more collaborative efforts and share intellectual resources.

In July 2001, the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM) helped this process along by placing the Osteopathic Clinical Research Database on its Web site at www.aacom.org. This database is intended to be a first-line effort to stimulate research communications within the profession. The database serves as the backbone of the clinical research portion of AACOM's Web site, which will be a springboard for facilitating collaboration, education, intellectual support referral, and identification of grant and funding opportunities. The Web site also contains examples of successful NIH grant proposals, the ABCs of grant and proposal writing, a directory of osteopathic clinical practice sites, a calendar of research conferences and technical workshops, and a suggestion box for improvements to the site.

Putting collaboration on-line

Those who visit the Web site and wish to use the database as a collaborative tool should register and indicate their interests, as well as note potential collaborative projects. A search engine then assists researchers in finding specific projects on with which to collaborate and provides support to develop a list server with which to electronically interact with fellow researchers. AACOM's Web site also contains links to the colleges of osteo-



pathic medicine and their respective research departments.

As an educational center, the Web site will include information on research development courses and key research lectures that can help people become successful clinical researchers. Links to such educational resources are updated periodically. In addition, standardized research protocols will be developed, as will a mechanism for providing critiques of rejected proposals.

As an intellectual support referral center, the Web site provides access to epidemiologists, biostatisticians, and successful NIH grant recipients. A general mentorship program will be available in the near future.

Linking osteopathic physicians with resources

AACOM's Web site also lists appropriate grant opportunities, including program announcements and requests for proposals from a wide array of governmental and private sources. Links to such funding agencies as the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) and the NIH have also been established. Examples of successful NIH grant proposals are

posted, including templates of proposals for a variety of different grant types.

Also available is a directory of osteopathic clinical practice sites, identifying osteopathic physicians and practice groups with an interest in serving as clinical trial collaboration sites. The directory will allow searches by patient population types, geographic location, physician specialty, and other parameters after the next phase of development is completed. The researcher directory is intended to facilitate networking and marketing. The site includes a calendar of research conferences and technical assistance workshops, and will include a mailing list and "Ask the Experts" section in the future.

To help provide quality control, the site includes an electronic suggestion box, through which users can provide ideas for improvement. By filling out a convenient on-line electronic form, users can easily identify Web site problems and shortcomings.

The site is designed to be user-friendly and inviting. Visitors can access the database through the AACOM Web site from one of four different perspectives: researcher, AACOM constituent group member, public, or administrator. The specific "view" that a

user chooses will allow that person access to the material most appropriate to his or her needs.

In addition, AACOM contact staff are available to assist users of the site and the clinical research database should those users encounter problems. Specifically, visitors can contact Cathleen Kearns via e-mail at ckearns@aacom.org or Tamara Thompson-Johnson at tthompson@aacom.org.

As researchers make use of the Web site and database, and as the site is expanded and enhanced, AACOM hopes to increase the profession's research credibility and improve the level of excellence in osteopathic medical research. This pilot effort emphasizes osteopathic manipulative medicine research as an area of collaboration, but the site and database are intended to be open to all types of scientific investigations.

Michael J. Dyer, JD

Vice President for Government
Relations
American Association of Colleges of
Osteopathic Medicine
Chevy Chase, Maryland

Douglas L. Wood, DO, PhD

President
American Association of Colleges of
Osteopathic Medicine
Chevy Chase, Maryland