



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Veterans Health Administration
Washington DC 20420

May 15, 2023

The Honorable Denis McDonough
Secretary, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough:

In our shared efforts to advance VA's national leadership in health professions education, it is with great pleasure that I submit the minutes from the National Academic Affiliations Council's (NAAC) face-to-face meeting held on March 22-23, 2023.

The Council commends VA's dedication to strengthening external relationships with the academic community. As evidenced by its March 2023 meeting, the Council continues to explore the many benefits of seamless integration between VA and its academic affiliates to enhance Veterans' access to advancements in health care. The Council respectfully forwards four recommendations, summarized below for your consideration.

Health professions trainees (HPTs) make up a fourth of VA's health care workforce, and the Council is concerned with VA's inability to onboard HPTs promptly and ensure that they receive accurate and timely access to the Veteran's health record. This prevents HPTs from being able to care for Veterans on day one and throughout their educational experience. VA offices should come together to eliminate barriers to these issues. Once onboarded and immersed in their educational experience, the Council recommends that HPTs at every facility have access to simulation training that includes interprofessional opportunities. The Council also fully supports VA's utilization of federal supremacy to sustain the full scope of health care services for Veterans and HPTs' educational needs. Lastly, the Council recommends legislative relief from certain Conflict of Interest statutes which create challenges for the recruitment and retention of clinician educators, leaders and researchers in VA.

Thank you for your review and consideration of these recommendations. We look forward to your feedback.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James E.K. Hildreth", is positioned above the typed name.

James E.K. Hildreth, PhD, MD (Chair)
VA National Academic Affiliations Council

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
National Academic Affiliations Council (NAAC)
Meeting Minutes for March 22-23, 2023**

**Orlando VA Health Care System (OVAHCS)
13800 Veterans Way
Orlando, FL**

The National Academic Affiliations Council met in person on March 22 and 23, 2023, at the Orlando VA Health Care System. A quorum was present, affording the Council the opportunity to conduct normal business.

Attendance: See Appendix

Day 1: March 22, 2023

Welcome, Announcements, and Introduction of New Members

Ms. Emory called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM and welcomed members to the meeting. A short welcome video was played.

Dr. James Hildreth, NAAC Chair, welcomed NAAC members and provided the opportunity for members to introduce themselves.

Innovative Academic Relationships: A National Perspective

VHA Chief Academic Affiliations Officer, Marjorie Bowman, MD, MPA, presented VA's new mission statement, noting the academic mission as one of VA's four statutory missions. She discussed the scope and impact of VA training, which includes approximately 118,000 health professions trainees (HPTs) in over 60 disciplines, and that more than 70% of U.S. physicians have completed training at VA. She noted how VA health professions education (HPE) enhances the quality of and access to care. Dr. Bowman discussed how many VA facilities are deliberately co-located close to their medical school affiliate and the importance of the Teague-Cranston Act which created five new medical schools based on VA land. She highlighted MISSION Act, Section 403 and OAA's focus on Indian and Tribal organizations, which have great needs.

VISN 8 and Orlando VA Health Care System (OVAHCS) Affiliations and Academic Relationships

Opening Remarks

Timothy Cooke, Medical Center Director, OVAHCS, welcomed the NAAC and explained OVAHCS's strategic initiatives, including being a leader in education affiliations. He explained how OVAHCS became a 1A facility shortly after becoming independent from the Tampa Health Care System in 2006. Another important investment has been in

research and innovation, allowing OVAHCS to attract staff members and plan for the future.

Orlando VA Health Care Systems Executive Overview

Lisa Zacher, MD, MACP, FCCP, Chief of Staff, OVAHCS, presented an overview of the OVAHCS, including its development, growth and current status. OVAHCS serves over 140,000 Veterans across three large multi-specialty outpatient clinics and five smaller community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs). OVAHCS has the most encounters for any VA for the last three years. Dr. Zacher explained that OVAHCS's success was greatly due to, and enhanced by, their integration of the whole health concept, which meant having many specialists and specialized care services in the same center. OVAHCS and the national SimLEARN center continue to expand.

Academic Affiliation with OVAHCS

Deborah German, MD, Vice President for Health Affairs, Founding Dean, University of Central Florida (USF), stated that UCF could not have a better partner than OVAHCS and briefed on how the affiliation began. She highlighted affiliation benefits including the Focused Inquiry and Research Experience (FIRE) project and discussed UCF students and faculty training and working at VA; 246 VA physicians are UCF College of Medicine affiliate faculty members.

Veteran Integrated Service Network (VISN) 8 Executive Overview

Edward Cutolo, MD, Chief Medical Officer, VA Sunshine Healthcare Network, VISN 8, presented an overview of VISN 8. The VISN serves about 1.5 million Veterans making up 10% of the entire VA system geographically, including Puerto Rico, and is unique in having 6 1A facilities and 1 1C facility. The 670,000 Veterans treated annually are a diverse population of Veterans ranging in age 55 and older, but there are a high percentage of female Veterans in the younger age groups. Annually, the VISN has over 8,000 HPTs with 976 HPT full-time equivalents (FTEs) and OAA HPT salary support of \$77 million. Dr. Cutolo discussed VISN 8's use of a pathway to VA staff positions for students, which elevated the quality of care given and created education and recruitment opportunities. He highlighted the VISN's over 200 academic affiliations, many of which are minority serving institutions. In addition to the national SimLEARN, the VISN also focuses on the use of simulations in all of their medical centers to facilitate learning.

Question & Answer Session

Dr. Evans asked if HPTs were being trained in integrated care models; specifically, if psychology HPTs were trained in whole health around pain management and behavioral interventions. Dr. Zacher said medical students had whole health rotations, and Dr. German added that primary nurse practitioner students were also being taught

this. Dr. German explained that OVAHCS had its own, multi-disciplinary, chronic pain clinic that psychology students rotated through.

Dr. Henderson asked if OVAHCS was mainly focused on recruiting primary care doctors or sub-specialists. Dr. Zacher replied that primary care was a foundation of VA and will always be a priority. Dr. Zacher added that they also had specialist priorities, mainly psychology, psychiatry and social work. Dr. Henderson asked about collaboration between VA and the medical school regarding faculty development. Dr. German replied that the responsibilities of the medical school's Dean for Faculty Affairs position included ensuring equal levels of faculty development for the College of Medicine's entire faculty; employed, affiliated and voluntary.

In response to Dr. Henderson's question about OVAMC's focus on family medicine physicians, Dr. Thompson noted in OVAMC, family medicine residents are an important pathway to primary care; they have a limited number of resident positions. Dr. Cutolo added Bay Pines has family practice rotations, noting some affiliates have a primary care track in internal medicine.

Diversity in the Health Care Workforce Subcommittee (DHWS) Update

Susan Bakewell-Sachs, PhD, RN, FA, Vice President for Nursing Affairs and Dean Oregon Health and Science University School of Nursing, DHWS Co-Chair, stated DHWS is focused on developing strategic goals. One of the areas of interest for the subcommittee is the Healthcare Professions Talent Academy to interest learners in health care careers earlier in their education. DHWS welcomed six new members; the next meeting will be March 23, 2023, following the NAAC meeting. She highlighted diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs from different VHA offices.

Strategic Academic Advisory Council Update

Erin Patel, PsyD, ABPP, Executive Director, Health Professions Education, OAA, provided an update on the Strategic Academic Advisory Council (SAAC) activities and top priorities:

- HPE's office transformation project is working to ensure Designated Education Officers (DEO) receive additional staffing needed to carry out their missions. OAA has released \$15 million in funding so every facility with disbursement agreements can hire at least one disbursement coordinator.
- Network Academic Affiliations Officer (NAAO) role: SAAC endorsed OAA's protected time recommendations for education roles, including a recommendation that 25% of NAAO time be protected.
- Customer Satisfaction Survey showed overall satisfaction with OAA has decreased somewhat due to increased and necessary focus by OAA on policy and fiscal compliance.
- A national salary survey resulted in stipend increases for pre-degree students to the \$15 per hour federal minimum wage, and 8 professions at the post-degree

level were given stipend increases. All the other paid professions that did not submit proposals received 3% stipend increases.

Dr. Kowalski asked about pre-degree stipends. Dr. Patel stated several disciplines, such as social work graduate students and licensed counselors, do receive a stipend, particularly in high priority career disciplines.

VHA Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM): Update on Roll-Out and Governance, Open Discussion with NAAC Members

Edward A. Walton, MD, Director, Medical Informatics Unit, OAA stated that the EHRM roll-out is currently paused and gave updates on topics related to EHRM, including the new Health Profession Council focused on HPT engagement with EHRM. The Council heard concerns related to:

- Computer-based training requirement of 8-18 hours: EHRM granted the Council's request to lower the requirement to four hours.
- Cerner system's lack of data about HPTs' contribution to care: the data management organizer add-on now allows for increased data collection.
- IT and security concerns:
 - 30-day IT account disabling
 - Microsoft 365 – 90-day license revocation
 - 180-day PIV renewal requirement: currently HPT's PIV cards are valid for three years; OIT and Security want to limit it to 180 days
 - Special agreement check (SAC) vs. Tier 1 background check – HPTs are low risk
- Ongoing concerns include deployment timeline for complex VAMCs, training hours and user roles and provisioning for HPTs, unclear guidance of site support after go-live and readiness assessment before go-live.

Dr. Kazer asked about the proposed changes from OIT and Security. Dr. Walton stated the top priority is to gain an understanding by OIT and Security of the unique onboarding and provisioning requirements for HPTs.

Council Discussion and Recommendations

The Council discussed the security and information issues Dr. Walton highlighted.

Day 2: March 23, 2023

Welcome and Review of Day 1

Dr. James Hildreth welcomed attendees back for the second day of the meeting. Mr. Cooke said he hoped that the discussions and tours the prior day had been interesting and helpful. He presented challenge coins to all of the Council members. Dr. Hildreth thanked Mr. Cooke.

Orlando VAHCS Panel Discussion: Trainee Recruitment and Retention

Jennifer Thompson, MD, MPH, Associate Chief of Staff for Education, OVAHCS, introduced the panel topic and asked panelists questions about their experience training and teaching at OVAHCS. Panelists shared their motivations for returning to VA after completing their training and joining VA's education staff, which included an appreciation for VA's interdisciplinary patient care model and enjoyment gained from watching HPTs learn and grow. They also shared insights on challenges in VA that they have overcome, to include space limitations in facilities to accommodate all the programs offered, navigating the size and complexity of the VA system, and how some HPTs become accustomed to the amount of resources VA provides them and that in community clinics and in rural areas they would likely not have the same resource availability.

In response to nursing related questions from Dr. Kowalski and Dr. Bakewell-Sachs, panelists briefed on details of each program and the collaborations with affiliate universities. Dr. Henderson and Dr. Rios asked about diversity and cultural competency, to which panelists shared that diversity was a priority for OVAHCS noting a HPT who recently won an award for their work on diabetes in the local Hispanic community and that the VA CBOCs were major participants in the project.

Council Discussion and Recommendations

Dr. James Hildreth discussed four topics as recommendations for Secretary consideration:

- **Recommendation 1: The NAAC strongly recommends that 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 HPTs are onboarded promptly and accurately and receive timely access to the Veteran's health record.**
- **Recommendation 2: The NAAC strongly recommends legislative relief from the Conflict of Interest (COI) restrictions for any education personnel, including Designated Education Officers (DEOs) and VA Site Directors. The COI statutes create challenges with recruitment and retention of quality clinician educators, leaders, and researchers in VA.**
- **Recommendation 3: The NAAC recommends every VA medical facility with health professions education programs provide access to simulation training for trainees. Simulation training for HPTs should include interprofessional training experiences.**

- **Recommendation 4: The NAAC supports VA's utilization of federal supremacy to sustain the full scope of health services for Veterans' health. The education of health professions trainees should include access to all health services offered by the Veterans Health Administration, regardless of location.**

Recommendations received voice support by council members present.

Public Comments

There were no public comments.

Final Comments and Adjournment

Dr. Evans said he felt the tours and being in-person were very helpful.

Dr. O'Toole commented that the spontaneous substantive discussions were some of the most interesting and constructive parts of the meeting.

Dr. Bakewell-Sachs replied that the meeting had given her a broader and deeper perspective on interdisciplinary care.

Dr. Hildreth thanked the Council members for their attendance and participation.
Meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

Appendix: Attendance Records

Council Members Present:

Susan Bakewell-Sachs, PhD, RN, FAAN, Vice President, Nursing Affairs and Dean, School of Nursing, Oregon Health & Science University; Marjorie A. Bowman, MD, MPA (Ex-Officio), Chief Academic Affiliations Officer, Office of Academic Affiliations; Arthur Evans, Jr., PhD, Chief Executive Officer and Executive Vice President, American Psychological Association; Deborah German, MD, Vice President for Health Affairs, Founding Dean, UCF College of Medicine; David Henderson, MD, Vice President for Equity, Diversity and Belonging, Medical Education, American Medical Association; James E. K. Hildreth (Chair), PhD, MD, President and Chief Executive Officer, Department of Internal Medicine, Meharry Medical College; Meredith Wallace Kazer, PhD, CNL, APRN, A/GNP-BC, FAAN, Dean and Professor, Fairfield University School of Nursing; Timothy Kowalski, DO, D.FRACN, Vice Provost for Professional and Public Relations, American Osteopathic Association; 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; Elena Rios, MD, MSPH, FACP, President & CEO, National Hispanic Medical Association; and 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

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.), CAPT, MC, USN (Ret.), Dean, School of Medicine, Professor of Surgery, Uniformed Services University (Ex-Officio); Maga Jackson-Triche, MD, MSHS, Assistant Vice Chancellor and Health Executive Advisor for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), University of California San Francisco; Paul Jung, MD, MPH, FACPM (Ex-Officio), Captain, United States Public Health Service (USPHS), Director, Division of Medicine and Dentistry, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA); Kelly R. Ragucci, PharmD, FCCP, BCPS, Vice President, Professional Development, American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP); Anthony M. Stazzone, MD, MBA, FACP (Ex-Officio), Network Chief Medical Officer, VA MidSouth Healthcare Network, VISN 9; and Alison J. Whelan, MD, Chief Medical Education Officer, Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC).

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

Abdo Asmar, MD, FACP, Program Director, Internal Medicine Residency Program, Professor of Medicine and Medical Education, OVAHCS, UCF College of Medicine; Veronica Berluche, DNP, APRN-BC, Primary Care Nurse Practitioner Resident, OVAHCS; Timothy Cooke, Medical Center Director/CEO, Orlando VA Health Care System (OVAHCS); Cheryl Cooper, MSN, PMHNP-BC, PMH-C, Acting Director, Primary Care Nurse Practitioner Residency Program, OVAHCS; Edward Cutolo, MD, Chief Medical Officer, VA Sunshine Healthcare Network, Veteran integrated Service

Network (VISN) 8; Larissa A. Emory, PMP, CBP, MS, Management and Program Analyst (Designated Federal Officer for the NAAC); Richard Henriquez, MD, Internal Medicine Residency Program, University of Central Florida, College of Medicine, Site Director, OVAHCS; Jeannie Howard, Management Analyst; Tonya Lobbestael, Public Affairs Officer (Alternate Designated Federal Officer for the NAAC); Nellie Mitchell, MS, RHIA, Program Analyst (Alternate Designated Federal Officer for the NAAC); Dalena Nguyen, PharmD, Clinical Pharmacy Practitioner, OVAHCS; Erin Patel, PsyD, ABPP, Executive Director, Health Professions Education; Jennifer C. Thompson, MD, MPH, Associate Chief of Staff for Education, OVAHCS; Edward Walton, MD, Director, Medical Informatics Unit; and Lisa Zacher, MD, MACP, FCCP, Chief of Staff, OVAHCS.

Members of the Public attending:

Jelessa M.H. Burney, MPA, Program Specialist, Advisory Committee Management Office, VA; Fungchow (Alex) Chiu, PhD, Senior Program Manager, Office of Research and Development; Gary R. Hill, DO, FACOI, Associate Dean for Clinical Education, DEI Officer, Orlando College of Osteopathic Medicine (proposed); Dan Newhaller, DO, President, DEO, Orlando College of Osteopathic Medicine (proposed); Jacqueline R. Wall, PhD, Director, Office of Program Consultation and Accreditation and Associate Executive Director, Education Directorate, American Psychological Association.