

From: DJS [<mailto:vacodjs1@va.gov>]
Sent: Wednesday, March 29, 2017 7:11 AM
To: 'Thomas L Schwenk' <tschwenk@med.unr.edu>
Cc: John Prescott <jprescott@aamc.org>
Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL] VA--Medical School Collaboratioin

Dr Schwenk- this is an excellent suggestion and we will do this

Thank you

David Shulkin

Sent with Good (www.good.com)

-----Original Message-----

From: Thomas L Schwenk [tschwenk@med.unr.edu]
Sent: Tuesday, March 28, 2017 11:05 PM Eastern Standard Time
To: Shulkin, David J., MD
Cc: John Prescott
Subject: [EXTERNAL] VA--Medical School Collaboratioin

Dear Dr. Shulkin—

Dr. Prescott suggested you would be interested to hear from members of the Council of Deans re: our suggestions for improving collaborations between the VA and their partner medical schools. I have copied him at his request.

Based on my experience with VA health centers and their leaders (n=4, the University of Michigan, the Las Vegas VA, and 2 Executive Directors at the Reno VA), my sense is that on the surface the rigidity and bureaucracy of the VA system are major barriers that inhibit collaboration, in the form of excessively limiting contracts, lack of financial flexibility, and overly zealous accountability for faculty and resident effort. Yet somehow some VAs and their partners thrive while others do not.

I attribute this almost entirely to the specific contributions of the Executive Directors, and to some extent the Chiefs of Staff. Some follow the rules and regulations strictly, and even add their own even more rigid interpretations, whereas others are creative in their interpretations, and find ways, as do all successful Federal bureaucrats, to achieve their aspirations. The most direct example of this is the Reno VA, whose former ED was entirely lacking in ambitious, vision and creativity, and whose current ED, Lisa Howard, is exactly the opposite. She is an extraordinary partner who is aspirational, dedicated, and visionary. She follows all appropriate regulations but finds ways to make them work for the good of the VA, our school of medicine, and, mostly importantly, veterans. Our partnership has thrived with new ideas at literally every monthly affiliation meeting.

I humbly offer the following suggestion. You might consider asking each medical school dean whether their VA ED partner has the characteristics of Lisa Howard, and find those who are

exemplars as leaders who find ways to use the medical school partnership for the benefit of veterans. Select 6-8 of those most highly evaluated and invite them as inaugural members of a VA Health Center Executive Directors Advisory Committee. Bring them to the VA National Academic Affiliations Council, or perhaps to you directly, as consultants to teach you and their colleagues best practices for creating these strong relationships. They could also point out areas needing attention and suggest regulatory and other changes to support even more success. One in particular I would suggest is a less restrictive approach to accounting for resident effort so as to allow more joint training opportunities for residents supported by the VA.

Congratulations on your appointment and best wishes for your success.

Tom

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