

The Commission on Family Medicine

Background of Commission: The Commission on Family Medicine was founded in 1977 through the bipartisan efforts of Democratic State Senator Harvey Phelps, MD, of Pueblo and Republican State Representative Tillie Bishop of Grand Junction. Both shared a vision that the people of Colorado, particularly those in rural and underserved areas, needed assured access to primary care physicians. The formation of COFM established funding for family medicine education. The statutory authority of COFM is found at Title 25-1-901 through 25-904, Colorado Revised Statutes (2013). The specific duties of the Commission, as outlined in the statute, are:

- Assure the residency programs maintain high quality training
- Approve and recommend allocation of state funds to the programs
- Locate areas of the state that are underserved by family physicians
- Offer ideas on providing medical care to the medically indigent in the state
- Support the development of rural training programs

Board composition: COFM is composed of 19 members: governor-appointed citizens from each of the seven congressional districts, a program director from each of the nine family medicine residency programs, a representative from the Colorado Academy of Family Physicians, and the deans of the two medical schools (the University of Colorado School of Medicine and the Rocky Vista University College of Osteopathic Medicine). The citizen members serve 3-year terms and are eligible to be re-appointed one time. A citizen member serves as chair and is elected by the board.

Expectations of COFM Board members: Board members are expected to attend meetings, prepare for meetings (review agenda, minutes, attached documents), read and respond to emails, and visit at least two training sites (residency programs, rural training sites, or urban underserved training sites). In addition, there are several optional activities for board members:

- Visit additional residency programs or rural training sites
- Visit the Capitol to advocate for Commission or testify to a committee
- Share articles/expertise with other members of the Commission
- Educate the public about family medicine education
- Volunteer for a special project, such as marketing or planning an event

Meetings: The Commission typically meets four times a year. Under special circumstances, additional meetings may be scheduled. Standing meetings are conducted in Denver on the third Wednesday of February, June, September, and November. Below are common agenda topics:

- State funding to support family medicine residency programs
- Progress and status of required rural rotations
- Recruitment of students and retention of graduates
- Legislative issues that pertain to family medicine residency programs
- State, regional, and national issues that may affect residency education
- Annual approval of the strategic plan

Mission and Vision: The mission of COFM is to address the health care needs of the people of Colorado through the education of family physicians and the promotion of patient-centered primary care. The vision of COFM is through a unique statewide public-private collaboration, lead the nation's premier family medicine residencies in providing quality family physicians for the people of Colorado, while positively impacting health and health care through the power of primary care.

Training Family Physicians: To become a family physician, an individual completes seven years of training beyond college. The steps include graduation from an accredited MD or DO medical school, application and acceptance to a family medicine residency program, and completion of three years of residency training. To become a board certified family physician, the candidate must pass the board certifying exam near the time of graduation from residency. The training in family medicine is comprehensive and includes inpatient care, continuity care in a family medicine clinic, obstetrics, pediatrics, geriatrics, surgery, health promotion and behavior change, and several other medical specialty areas as part of a well-rounded education. During their training, family medicine residents in Colorado learn to provide team-based, integrated, and coordinated care in a patient-centered medical home (PCMH).

Funding the Residency Programs: The nine programs operate independently and each is supported by a sponsoring hospital. Funding for the residency programs comes from several sources, including Medicare Graduate Medical Education (GME) funds, Medicaid, patient revenue, the sponsoring hospitals, state funds, and grants. COFM has a line item in the state budget. State funding allocated to COFM is disbursed equally among the nine programs. An important goal of COFM is to advocate for continued state funding.

Rural training experience: Since the late 1980's, the Commission has required that family medicine residents in Colorado complete a one-month rotation at a rural site. The purpose for the rural exposure is to increase the likelihood that residents will choose to practice in a rural location upon graduation. The Commission has approved several locations in which the resident can complete this rural experience. The Commission staff coordinates the rural rotation schedule and periodically reviews the sites to assure they meet training standards.

Recruiting Medical Students to Train in Colorado: Another function of the Commission is to support the recruitment of high quality medical students to complete their residency in Colorado. Nationally, less than 10% of medical students are choosing family medicine as their specialty. Despite this national trend, COFM has been successful recruiting medical school graduates to Colorado's residency programs. Typically, several hundred medical students from over 100 medical schools interview to fill the 79 positions each year.