

MEDICAL BOARD STAFF REPORT

DATE REPORT ISSUED: January 23, 2014
ATTENTION: Members, Medical Board of California
SUBJECT: Legislative Proposal
STAFF CONTACT: Jennifer Simoes, Chief of Legislation

BACKGROUND

The Medical Board of California (Board) raised the issue of accelerated three-year and competency-based medical school programs as a new issue in its Sunset Report. A nationwide physician shortage is projected to reach 90,000+ physicians by the year 2020. Nearly half of that shortage is projected for primary care doctors (family physicians, pediatricians, and family practitioners). The federal Affordable Care Act (ACA) contains provisions to relieve the projected shortage of primary care professionals. Combined with the Prevention and Public Health Fund and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the ACA will provide for the training, development and placement of more than 16,000 primary care providers, including physicians, over the next five years. A significant deterrent to becoming a physician is the substantial cost of medical education. At an estimated cost of \$80,000 per year, a medical student can easily accrue a debt of up to \$400,000 upon graduation.

In an effort to reduce the nationwide shortage of primary care doctors, as well as lessen burdens on medical students, there is a movement toward an accelerated three-year curriculum. This curriculum would allow medical students to receive the same amount of education in a concentrated, modified year-round education schedule, by eliminating the existing summer breaks, which occur currently in the standard four-year program. Reducing or eliminating the summer breaks allows for an accelerated curriculum completion date.

One such example is the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Medicine that offers a Family Medicine Accelerated Track (F-MAT) curriculum that provides 10-12 medical students the opportunity to obtain a medical degree in 3 years with 149 contact weeks, as opposed to a traditional four-year program of 160 weeks. In addition, the F-MAT does not require the medical school student to pass USMLE Step 2CS prior to graduation, unlike most Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) accredited medical schools. However, the F-MAT students will be required to pass USMLE Step 2CS during their first year of postgraduate training. Normally, LCME accredited medical school graduates are required to pass USMLE Step 2CS as a graduation requirement and must pass USMLE Step 3 during residency training. F-MAT graduates must also pass USMLE Step 3 during residency and successfully complete residency to be eligible for licensure.

The F-MAT also has an incentive program where students are given a scholarship in their first year. It is estimated that approximately \$50,000 can be saved by the student in an accelerated 3-year program. This is a substantial economic incentive to a potential medical student.

There are also some California Medical School Programs that are proposing or considering competency-based tracks for students that excel and can progress at a faster rate than the standard four-year program.

There is a concern that some accelerated programs may not meet the requirements of Business and Professions Code Sections 2089 – 2091.2, and legislative changes are needed in order to accommodate changes in medical education and to license graduates from the accelerated curriculum programs.

Specifically:

- Section 2089(a) provides “a medical curriculum extending over a period of at least four academic years, or 32 months of actual instruction . . . the total number of hours of all courses shall consist of a minimum of 4,000 hours. At least 80% of actual attendance shall be required.”
- Section 2089.5(b) provides “instruction in the clinical courses shall total a minimum of 72 weeks in length.”
- Section 2089.5(c) provides “instruction in the core clinical courses of surgery, medicine, family medicine, pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, and psychiatry shall total a minimum of 40 weeks in length, with a minimum of eight weeks in pediatrics, six weeks in obstetrics and gynecology, a minimum of four weeks in family medicine and four weeks in psychiatry.”
- Section 2089.5(d) provides “of the instruction . . . 54 weeks shall be performed in a hospital that sponsors the instruction . . .”

RECOMMENDATION

Board staff has met with staff from the University of California (UC) Office of the President and discussed the need for legislation to accommodate the accelerated three-year and competency-based medical school programs. Board staff has drafted language that would allow for these programs, only if they are accredited by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME). Board staff has determined that applicants who graduate from an accredited LCME program meet the minimum medical education requirements. Board staff is requesting approval from the Board to co-sponsor legislation with the UC to allow for accelerated three-year and competency-based medical school programs, only if they are approved and accredited by LCME. Board staff recommends that legislation only be co-sponsored by the Board if the UC Office of the President is approved to co-sponsor the legislation.