



State Medical Board Visitation Programs

Heidi M. Koenig, MD, *Editor-in-Chief*

According to the FSMB's most recent Census of Licensed Physicians, there are now more than 1 million licensed physicians in the United States, representing a physician workforce that has grown by 20% over the last decade.

Waiting in the wings to join the profession are thousands of medical students, currently enrolled in the nation's medical schools, and just behind them are countless young people in college and high school who are beginning to consider careers in medicine.

Much hope for the future of the medical profession rides upon their shoulders, and those of us who are actively engaged in medical regulation have a particularly vested interest in their success: Simply put, we want to help them avoid the pitfalls and hazards that can ultimately bring them under the scrutiny of a state medical board.

That means they need to learn, early on, the ethics and principles that form the bedrock of medical professionalism, and become just as familiar with the nuts and bolts of maintaining licensure — everything from engaging in continuing medical education to understanding the details of a state's medical practice act.

And yet, it's easy for medical students and young physicians to push these details to the side and focus almost singularly on their clinical skills. In the process, many leave themselves vulnerable to easily avoidable professional issues that may lead to regulatory interventions.

Professionalism is acknowledged as a core component of medical practice by virtually all of the major medical education organizations — from the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education to the Association of American Medical Colleges. But are future physicians absorbing the fundamentals of professionalism as thoroughly as they might? And, of key interest to medical regulators, are they getting a proper introduction to the role that state medical boards will play during their careers?

In this issue of *JMR*, we offer an exploration of these questions and highlight a tool that state medical boards are finding very helpful in the quest

to raise awareness of their work — board visitation programs for medical students.

Some boards have had great success with these programs, in which students are invited to state medical board meetings to see firsthand how medical regulation works — including listening in as cases are discussed.

In a special, expanded version of *JMR*'s ongoing "State Medical Board Practices" feature, starting on the next page, we have collected three essays on this topic.

In the first essay, staff and former medical students from the Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine at Florida International University discuss the challenges of teaching professionalism and describe how a visitation program helped change the perspectives of two students who attended state medical board proceedings in Florida.

In the second essay, we learn details of a board visitation program created by the Board of Medicine of the District of Columbia, including advice for other boards interested in establishing similar programs.

And in the third essay, a longstanding visitation program of the Arizona Board of Osteopathic Examiners in Medicine and Surgery is highlighted. The board estimates that its program, which is now in its 21st year, has facilitated visits to board meetings for nearly 6,000 medical students — with excellent results.

Beyond teaching professionalism, these programs also give young people a glimpse of how physicians can expand their horizons beyond the clinic and serve the public as state board members. My own path to board membership in Kentucky started when I attended national medical legislative conferences and learned how the actions of state and national legislators can dramatically impact medical practice. Over time, I gained a reputation as a patient advocate, and that eventually led to my appointment to the Kentucky Board of Medical Licensure.

Those of us who serve on state boards should be doing all we can to ignite a spark for public service among young people — and board visitation programs strike me as a good way to accomplish that goal.