

THE ROAD TO ACCREDITATION

At the start, the road wasn't smooth for the College of Medicine – because we blazed a whole new trail. In the end, however, we helped open the accreditors' eyes to the need for more physicians, especially in rural and other underserved communities, in Florida and beyond.

IN THE BEGINNING

- **February-March 1998:** State Rep. Durell Peaden, a Crestview physician worried about the dwindling number of rural Panhandle primary-care doctors, filed a bill proposing a medical school at Florida State University. The bill stalled, but FSU got money to enhance its Program in Medical Sciences (through which students were completing their first year of medical school at FSU). The Legislature also provided money to study whether Florida – contrary to the prevailing view at the time – actually needed more physicians.
- **1999:** Working on the study that the Legislature commissioned, Florida State discovered that not only the rural Panhandle but the entire state had a great shortfall of physicians, especially in primary care.
- **Spring 2000:** Peaden filed House Bill 1121, the first to propose in detail the unique, community-based, multi-campus structure and mission of the FSU College of Medicine.
- **May 2000:** The College of Medicine was included in the final budget approved by the state House and Senate. Gov. Jeb Bush signed the bill into law the next month. The new college's mission was, and still is, “to educate and develop exemplary physicians who practice patient-centered health care, discover and advance knowledge, and are responsive to community needs, especially through service to older, rural, minority and underserved populations.”
- **August 2000:** The FSU College of Medicine was officially established, with Myra Hurt as its acting dean.

INITIAL PROVISIONAL ACCREDITATION

- **2001:** The College of Medicine's first new students arrived and began to hear the word “accreditation.” They learned that it involves meeting national standards for an education program's structure, function and performance. They were taught that initial provisional accreditation is the first step toward full accreditation, which requires completion of a multiple-year process that includes several on-site surveys by members of the Liaison Committee on Medical Education.
- **February 2001:** The LCME ruled that the College of Medicine was not ready for a site visit because it lacked a founding dean, facilities and other resources. Keep in mind that the

LCME had not been asked to accredit a new medical school since 1982. So Florida State was a new challenge.

- **April 2001:** Dean Joseph Scherger was hired.
- **August 2001:** The College of Medicine, operating in borrowed space on campus, submitted the database of information required for the LCME to schedule a site visit in December. The hope was that provisional accreditation might be granted in spring.
- **February 2002:** The LCME denied provisional accreditation, citing concerns about curriculum, resources, faculty size and other matters. Again, the LCME was bumping into issues it didn't usually encounter – because it hadn't visited any new medical schools in 20 years.
- **March 2002:** FSU President Sandy D'Alemberte filed a formal notice of appeal with the LCME.
- **April 2002:** The LCME upheld its decision to deny initial provisional accreditation.

Let's pause here for a moment. D'Alemberte is a lawyer. He actually had chaired the American Bar Association committee that accredits law schools – so he knows about accreditation. “I understood how you start out a law school and how you put [it] through its paces up to provisional accreditation and then to full accreditation,” he recalled in 2010. “[But the LCME] had no rules for provisional accreditation. They did not contemplate there would ever again be a [new] medical school in the United States. Their website said: There's no need for any additional physicians in the United States; there should be no new medical schools; you should not allow people who have gone to foreign medical schools a path to getting a medical license in the United States. Now, if you're an antitrust lawyer, and you want to describe an anti-competitive position, you now have the classic case. And they've got it on their website!

“They agreed to send in a site-inspection team. We were able to show them a rollout plan approved by the Legislature showing how much money we'd be getting each year. [They wrote] a great report. All logic told me that we were going to get provisional accreditation. I just didn't understand that THEY didn't understand what provisional accreditation was. It goes before the Liaison Committee, and they turn us down. So we filed an appeal. We lost!

“I now have to report to the Board of Trustees at Florida State.... Our general counsel [said], ‘What we need to do is invite the attorney general's antitrust people to that meeting.’ We made sure that the AMA and the Association of American Medical Colleges [which jointly sponsor the LCME] and their lawyers knew they were welcome to listen in. And the chief and deputy chief of the antitrust division of the Attorney General's Office show up. [They say], ‘We'll issue subpoenas to these organizations right away to let them know that there's an antitrust investigation. And we'll ask for certain records.’ [Within two days] we get a notice from the LCME that they'd like to reopen our proceedings.”

- **August 2002:** Having received an updated database from the College of Medicine, the LCME sent a survey team for a site visit focusing on the first- and second-year program.
- **October 2002:** The LCME granted initial provisional accreditation. “This is an exciting moment, not only for FSU, but also in the history of medical education,” said Dean Scherger. “As the first new medical school in a generation, we have an opportunity to build a 21st-century program from the ground up, and gaining initial provisional accreditation signifies that we have laid a solid foundation.”
- **June 2003:** The LCME notified the College of Medicine that, after reviewing the school’s third- and fourth-year education program, it had voted to continue the provisional accreditation. The report included praise for the dean, faculty, staff and students, as well as the use of medical information technology. It also noted that the focus on geriatric and community medicine provided “a distinctive opportunity for innovation in medical education.” And it commended the “exemplary” outreach programs for recruiting “diverse and disadvantaged students.”

FIRST FULL ACCREDITATION

- **July 2003:** The first three regional campuses opened in Tallahassee, Pensacola and Orlando.
- **November 2004:** Classes began in the new College of Medicine building on the main FSU campus. Also, an LCME survey team made another site visit.
- **February 2005:** The LCME notified the College of Medicine that it had been granted full accreditation, making it the first new U.S. M.D.-granting medical school to be established and accredited in more than 20 years. The LCME praised the “remarkable enthusiasm” of faculty, staff and students; the college’s success at recruiting underrepresented minority and rural students; the use of information technology; and the “outstanding facility,” including the “state-of-the-art” Clinical Learning Center.
- **2006:** The AAMC, in effect, admitted that the FSU College of Medicine was right when it forecast a shortage of physicians. It stated: “In the 1980s and 1990s, workforce analysts and public policymakers, with few exceptions, predicted the United States would experience a substantial excess of physicians by the beginning of the 21st century.... It is now evident that those predictions were in error.”

FIRST REACCREDITATION

- **In the years since full accreditation:** The College of Medicine had opened new regional campuses in Sarasota, Daytona Beach and Fort Pierce and rural clinical training sites in Marianna and Immokalee; graduated six classes; and grown from around 170 medical students to full enrollment of 480.

- **November 2009:** Formal preparation for an LCME reaccreditation site visit began with a committee meeting at the main campus.
- **The next 15 months:** The College of Medicine compiled a medical education database that would be used as the basis for performing an institutional self-study. “The institutional self-study is one of the most important activities we undertake as a College of Medicine,” Senior Associate Dean Alma Little said. “More than 100 individuals participated directly in our self-study process, and more than 1,000 faculty members and students responded to surveys that were implemented as a part of that process. Five subcommittees and an independent student self-study committee collected more than 1,300 pages of data, responding to the 125 LCME accreditation standards.”
- **February 2011:** The database was mailed to the LCME. It was packed into eight boxes and weighed more than 300 pounds.
- **April 2011:** For five days, the College of Medicine hosted a six-person accreditation survey team representing the LCME. The team comprised representatives from six medical schools: two deans, a professor of internal medicine, a fourth-year medical student, a vice dean for academic affairs and an associate dean for medical education. They spent two and a half days at the main campus, then split up for visits to regional campuses in Tallahassee, Daytona Beach and Pensacola, along with an afternoon at the rural clinical training site in Marianna. They met with students, faculty, administrators, staff, clerkship directors and clerkship faculty. “Our graduation and match statistics, our strong board scores and student performance with our community model, and the impacts we are having across the state have validated that this model is working and working very well,” Dean John P. Fogarty said afterward. “We appreciated having an opportunity to share examples of that success with our site visitors.”
- **Oct. 18, 2011:** The Florida State University College of Medicine learned that it had been granted a maximum eight-year accreditation by the LCME. Thus it became the first new medical school of the 21st century to be reaccredited. “This news was not unexpected based on the remarkable outcomes this medical school has produced since the first class of 30 students arrived in 2001,” said Dean Fogarty. “The leaders, administrators, faculty and students who helped plan and build this program should be extremely proud, as should all of our friends and supporters.”

In its letter of accreditation, the LCME cited several areas of strength within the program at Florida State:

- “The College of Medicine is a student-centered, educationally focused organization in which decision making and priority setting are guided by its primary mission to develop exemplary, patient-oriented physicians.”
- “The College of Medicine has a long-standing, well-organized and successful program for pipeline development and recruitment of students of diverse backgrounds.”

- “The community faculty apprenticeship model of clinical education provides students with the opportunity to see large numbers of patients, to be involved in all aspects of their care, and to be closely observed for development of competence in their roles as physicians.”
- “The College of Medicine should be commended for an impressive faculty development program, particularly for the diverse nature of the offerings and the sheer volume of effort expended to support the development of faculty on an ongoing basis.”
- “The retention rate for community faculty is high, creating a stable educational platform for the clinical program.”

LCME site-visit committee members indicated they were impressed by how well Florida State administered its community-based program, which sends third- and fourth-year students to cities across the state to receive one-on-one clinical training from experienced physicians. The learning takes place where the vast majority of people receive their health care, giving students the opportunity to directly interact with patients and take part in the types of cases they are most likely to encounter as practicing physicians.

The model is credited with helping Florida State produce a greater percentage of graduates entering primary care residency programs than any other medical school in the state since 2005.

The LCME measures compliance with accreditation standards in five areas: institutional setting, educational program for the M.D. degree, medical students, faculty and educational resources. Only LCME-accredited institutions may receive federal grants for medical education and participate in federal loan programs. In addition, attendance at an LCME-accredited program is required for U.S. allopathic medical students before they can take the U.S. Medical Licensing Exam or enter residency programs approved by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education.

- **Oct. 20, 2011:** The College of Medicine’s graduate medical education program learned that it had earned accreditation from the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education. That meant it could continue to be a sponsoring institution for residency programs. At the time, it had two such programs at Sacred Heart Hospital in Pensacola: one in pediatrics and one in obstetrics-gynecology. In addition, it was launching an internal medicine residency program with Tallahassee Memorial Hospital and a family medicine residency program with Lee Memorial Hospital in Fort Myers.

SECOND REACCREDITATION

- **January 2018:** The College of Medicine formally launched its reaccreditation process by establishing a steering committee and six self-study committees. The tasks included:
 - Collecting and reviewing data about the medical school and its educational programs.
 - Identifying institutional strengths and any concerns requiring action.

- Developing strategies and processes to ensure that strengths are maintained and concerns are properly addressed.
- Ensuring that processes are in place allowing the college to remain engaged in ongoing planning and quality improvement.

There are 12 LCME accreditation standards and 93 elements. During the self-study process, students, faculty, staff, administrators and other constituents performed a comprehensive review of institutional compliance with all standards and elements in the context of the educational program.

Everyone in the college had a role to play in the process, whether officially serving on one of the committees, attending meetings, gathering data, creating spreadsheets, or performing a multitude of other tasks during the self-study.

- **April 14-17, 2019:** The LCME site visit is scheduled.
- While the reaccreditation process was delayed due to the COVID pandemic, the Florida State University College of Medicine is fully accredited by the **Liaison Committee on Medical Education** through 2027. The next scheduled LCME site visit will occur during the 2026-27 academic year.

