

# Letters to the Editor

## To the Editor:

In March 2019, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine released a consensus committee report entitled *Medications for Opioid Use Disorder Save Lives*.<sup>1</sup> The report found that “To stem the opioid crisis, it is critical for all FDA-approved options to be available for all people with opioid use disorder.” The 3 current approved medications (methadone, buprenorphine and naltrexone) are available in multiple formulations, including long-acting implants and injectables, and all except methadone are usually prescribed in a physician’s office. The report found that a major barrier to medication use is “the lack of appropriate education and training among health care providers.”

The Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) plays an essential role in educating and training physicians. Currently, none of the ACGME’s curriculum components require that physicians-in-training learn to treat opioid addiction. At present, fewer than 7% of American physicians have completed the necessary 8-hour DATA waiver training to allow them to prescribe buprenorphine for opioid use disorder, a medication associated with a 50% or greater reduction in the probability of overdose death.<sup>2</sup> An ACGME requirement for such training in the over 11,000 programs they accredit would dra-

matically improve the nation’s capacity to address the opioid epidemic and begin to close enormous gaps in training with respect to addiction more generally.

In recent months, a group of medical students and faculty have asked the ACGME residency review committees to consider requiring training in addiction treatment for residents.<sup>3</sup> None have agreed to date. A recent JAMA blog posting set out the case for ACGME leadership; the response has been a willingness to consider the question further.<sup>4</sup> A bipartisan group of 31 members of the US Congress has also asked the ACGME to require that all physicians-in-training who care for patients with opioid use disorder learn to treat opioid addiction.<sup>5</sup>

We ask that the ACGME act promptly and establish a requirement that all residents and fellows who care for patients who use opioids, as well as their core faculty, receive specific training on the treatment of opioid use disorder. This is a defining moment for American medicine. It is our obligation to provide physicians with sufficient training to effectively treat patients with opioid use disorder.

We are writing to urge health care professionals to sign on to this letter at [www.AddictionTrainingForResidents.org](http://www.AddictionTrainingForResidents.org).

## Signatories:

*Josiah D. Rich, MD, MPH*  
Professor of Medicine and  
Epidemiology  
Brown University

Associate Dean, Continuing  
Medical Education  
Boston University School of  
Medicine/Boston Medical Center

*Katrina Armstrong, MD*  
Physician-in-Chief, Department  
of Medicine  
Massachusetts General Hospital

*Eli Y. Adashi, MD, MS, CPE, FACOG*  
Professor of Medical Science  
Former Dean of Medicine and  
Biological Sciences  
Brown University

*Scott A. Allen, MD, FACP*  
Professor Emeritus, Clinical Medicine  
University of California, Riverside  
Medical Director  
The Access Clinic, Borrego Health

*Monica Bharel, MD, MPH*  
Commissioner  
Massachusetts Department of  
Public Health

*Jia Ahmad, MPH*  
Medical Student  
Johns Hopkins School of Medicine

*Frederick L. Altice, MD, MA*  
Professor of Medicine and  
Public Health  
Yale University

*John M. Carethers, MD, MACP*  
C. Richard Boland Distinguished  
University Professor  
John G. Searle Professor and Chair,  
Department of Internal Medicine  
Professor, Human Genetics  
University of Michigan

*Daniel P. Alford, MD, MPH*  
Professor of Medicine

*Chinazo Cunningham, MD, MS*  
Professor, Departments of General  
Internal Medicine, Family and  
Social Medicine, and Psychiatry and  
Behavioral Sciences  
Associate Chief, Division of General  
Internal Medicine  
Albert Einstein College of Medicine

*Paul H. Earley, MD, DFASAM*  
President, The American Society of  
Addiction Medicine

*Jack A. Elias, MD*  
Senior Vice President for  
Health Affairs  
Dean of Medicine and  
Biological Sciences  
Frank L. Day Professor of Biology  
Professor of Medicine  
Brown University

*David Fiellin, MD*  
Professor of Medicine, Emergency  
Medicine, and Public Health  
Professor of Investigative Medicine  
Director, Yale Program in  
Addiction Medicine  
Director, Health Services and  
Research Core, Center for  
Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS  
Yale School of Public Health

*Traci Green, PhD, MSc*  
Associate Professor, Emergency  
Medicine  
Associate Director & Senior Scientist,  
Injury Prevention Research Center  
Boston University Medical Center,  
Emergency Medicine

*Shelly F. Greenfield, MD, MPH*  
President, American Academy of  
Addiction Psychiatry  
Kristine M. Trustey Endowed Chair  
in Psychiatry  
Chief Academic Officer, McLean  
Hospital  
Chief, Division of Women's Mental  
Health  
Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard  
Medical School  
Director, Clinical and Health Services  
Research and Education

Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse  
McLean Hospital

*Keith Humphreys, PhD*  
Esther Ting Memorial Professor of  
Psychiatry, Stanford University  
Former Senior Policy Advisor, White  
House Office of National Drug  
Control Policy

*Gerald T. Keusch, MD*  
Professor, Medicine and International  
Health  
Associate Director, National  
Emerging Infectious Diseases  
Laboratories  
Director, Collaborative Research Core  
Boston University

*Alan I. Leshner, PhD*  
Former Director, National Institute on  
Drug Abuse  
National Institutes of Health

*David C. Lewis, MD*  
Professor Emeritus of Community  
Health and Medicine  
Founder of the Center for Alcohol and  
Addiction Studies  
Brown University

*Wei Sum Li, MD*  
Chief Medical Resident  
Brown University, Warren Alpert  
Medical School

*Joseph Loscalzo, MD, PhD*  
Senior Physician, Brigham and  
Women's Hospital  
Head of the Department of Medicine  
at Brigham & Women's Hospital  
Harvard Medical School

*Paula J. Lum, MD, MPH*  
Professor of Medicine  
Program Director, UCSF Primary  
Care Addiction Medicine Fellowship  
University of California, San Francisco  
San Francisco General Hospital

*Yngvild Olsen, MD, MPH*  
Medical Director, Institutes for  
Behavior Resources, Inc.

Vice President of the American  
Society of Addiction Medicine

*Michael S. Parmaceck, MD*  
Frank Wister Thomas Professor of  
Medicine  
Chair, Department of Medicine  
Raymond and Ruth Perelman School  
of Medicine  
University of Pennsylvania

*Richard Saitz, MD, MPH*  
Chair, Department of Community  
Health Sciences (CHS)  
Professor of Community Health  
Sciences & Medicine  
Boston University School of Public  
Health  
Boston Medical Center

*Jeffrey H. Samet, MD, MA, MPH*  
Chief, General Internal Medicine  
John Noble Professor in General  
Internal Medicine & Professor of  
Public Health  
Boston University Schools of Medicine  
& Public Health  
Boston Medical Center

*Dean Schillinger, MD*  
UCSF Professor of Medicine  
Chief, UCSF Division of General  
Internal Medicine  
San Francisco General Hospital and  
Trauma Center

*Joshua M. Sharfstein, MD*  
Vice Dean for Public Health Practice  
and Community Engagement and  
Professor of Practice in Health Policy  
and Management  
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of  
Public Health

*Emma Simmons, MD, MPH*  
Salma Haider Endowed Chair  
Professor of Family Medicine  
Senior Associate Dean of Student  
Affairs  
University of California Riverside  
School of Medicine

*Continued on page 796*

*Continued from page 795*

*Jacqueline Tulskey, MD*

Professor of Medicine, Emeritus UCSF  
HIV, ID and Global Medicine at ZSFG  
Clinician's Consultation Center –  
Substance use Warmline

*Allan Tunkel, MD, PhD*

Associate Dean for Medical Education  
Brown University, Warren Alpert  
Medical School

*Sten H. Vermund, MD, PhD*

Dean and Anna M.R. Lauder  
Professor of Public Health  
Yale School of Public Health  
Professor of Pediatrics  
Yale School of Medicine

*Bob Wachter, MD*

Professor and Chair  
Department of Medicine, UCSF

*Sarah E. Wakeman, MD*

Medical Director, Massachusetts

General Hospital Substance Use  
Disorder Initiative

Program Director,  
Massachusetts General Hospital  
Addiction Medicine Fellowship  
Assistant Professor of Medicine,  
Harvard Medical School  
Chief Medical Officer, RIZE  
Massachusetts

*Alexander Walley, MD, MSc*

Associate Professor of Medicine  
Director, Grayken Addiction Medicine  
Fellowship  
Clinical Addiction Research and  
Education Unit  
Boston Medical Center/Boston  
University School of Medicine

*Alysse G. Wurcel, MD, MS*

Assistant Professor  
Division of Geographic Medicine and  
Infectious Diseases  
Department of Medicine,  
Tufts Medical Center

The views expressed are those of the authors  
and do not necessarily represent the views of  
their institutions.

## References

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October 8, 2019

## To the Editor:

To address the opioid epidemic in the US, the ACGME is taking a leadership role to create sustainable solutions for the appropriate use of pain medication and the recognition and treatment of patients with addiction. The medical profession must work together to provide the resources and training necessary for physicians caring for patients to most effectively treat Opioid Use Disorder.

As of July 2019, the ACGME requires that all residency and fellowship programs "provide instruction and experience in pain management if applicable for the specialty including recognition of the signs of addiction." As this is a core requirement, all specialty and subspecialty programs must provide, and all residents and fellows will receive this training. The ACGME is also providing resources to the graduate medical education community for this training on opioid use and treatment, which can be found here.

It is imperative that the medical community collaborate to address this issue. The ACGME is organizing a Congress of Medical Education Stakeholders

in April 2020 to discuss the optimal curriculum for the education and training of residents and fellows on issues related to the treatment of addiction and management of pain. These stakeholders will include specialty societies, their certifying boards, program directors of ACGME-accredited programs, and the ACGME Review Committees, as well as representatives of the continuum of medical education. While the ACGME provides an educational framework for residency and fellowship programs, the curricula are the purview of the individual programs and their Sponsoring Institutions, and the relevant specialty societies and certifying boards. It will take a coordinated effort by all of these groups to effectively define the education and training needs for the entire medical community. The ACGME is taking the leadership role of convening and coordinating these efforts.

The ACGME is also financially supporting, a member of the steering committee, and co-chairing the National Academy of Medicine's Action Collaborative on Countering the US Opioid Epidemic Education and Training Work Group. This group is also working towards a coordinated approach for the continuum of health professional education that addresses acute and chronic pain management and substance use dis-

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orders. This continuum, which includes non-physician providers, begins in medical school for physicians, is developed during residency and fellowship training, and is enhanced throughout a physician's career.

Measures to provide resources and training to today's practicing physicians will have the most immediate impact on this epidemic. The ACGME strongly supports the removal of barriers to the use of these resources by all practicing physicians through changes in regulatory and payment policies. Currently, there is proposed legislation in the US Congress to improve

access to these lifesaving therapies, which would allow physicians and other clinicians to immediately incorporate them into their practice.

The ACGME looks forward to continuing to work with the extended medical community to equip physicians with the full range of solutions needed to confront this epidemic.”

Sincerely,  
*Thomas J. Nasca, M.D., MACP*  
President and CEO ACGME