

COMMENT AND PERSPECTIVE FROM THE OFFICE OF THE DEAN, UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

September 11, 2014

Here is my latest message in the ongoing series giving perspective on relevant topics to promote communication and stimulate dialogue between the College of Medicine Dean's office and faculty.



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Vice President
for Health Affairs,
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Cincinnati VA Medical Center: A Key Affiliate

While the College of Medicine's primary affiliation is with UC Health, another very important affiliate is the Cincinnati Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC). It's essential that we remember the VAMC's strategic role in advancing College of Medicine programs across all three of our missions.

The VAMC is a practice site for many faculty, a major training site for medical students and residents and, increasingly, a home for important research projects. CoM faculty should view activities at the VAMC as an opportunity to achieve patient care, training and research objectives that will elevate College performance. Additionally, faculty and management can partner with the VAMC in ongoing improvement efforts.

A number of our full-time faculty have important VAMC leadership positions, including:

- Kate Chard, PhD
Acting Associate Chief of Staff for Research
- Peter Kotcher, MD
Chief of Mental Health Service
- Mark Molloy, MD
Chief of Surgery Service
- Austin Nobunaga, MD
Chief of Rehabilitation Medicine Service
- Ralph Panos, MD
Chief of Medicine Service
- Laura Sams, MD
Chief of Neurology Service

These and other individuals form a key link between our clinical department leadership and the VAMC and are important agents of communication, planning and collaborative activity. The VAMC leadership includes CEO Linda Smith and Interim Chief of Staff Barbara Temeck, MD, who are meeting regularly with me and Andrew Filak, MD, Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, as well as the service chiefs to assure strong clinical and training input.

Patient Partnership

The College of Medicine's role at the VAMC is that of a trusted, helpful partner across all three missions. The College's clinical faculty should increasingly work with the VAMC to provide patient care

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Cincinnati Veterans Affairs Medical Center

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in an effective and efficient mode. The Veterans Health Administration system has come under recent public criticism due to delays in access to care for our nation's veterans. The College of Medicine and UC Health are partnering with the Cincinnati VAMC to accommodate patient demands that cannot be met solely at the VAMC. College and UC Health leadership is working with the VAMC to facilitate patient care on a referral basis that is timely and has the highest level of outcomes. We all should be available and ready to assist. This is in addition to the care provided onsite at the Cincinnati VAMC by many of the clinical faculty of the College of Medicine.

The Cincinnati VAMC has more than 100 funded residency training positions and is a major teaching site for our postgraduate learners. Residents, fellows and medical students view their VA experience as an important—sometimes preferred—rotation. One of the key contributions of College faculty working at the VAMC is supervision of trainees. Dr. Filak is working with the VAMC to maximize utilization of their funded training positions. A close working relationship between program directors in clinical departments and the VAMC is key to maintaining and creating where there is a need the best possible resident and medical student experiences.

Research Opportunities

The VA funds both basic and clinical research that focuses on the health and wellness of veteran populations. Many of our faculty are funded by VA Merit Review Awards. College of Medicine applicants for these awards must be members of the VA staff. While physicians receive VA staff appointments for clinical duties, basic scientists (PhDs) may apply to compete for Merit awards through a process that is initiated at the local VAMC. Laboratory space is available at the VAMC and there are plans for a new VA research facility that will enhance their research environment. The VAMC also is home to our Clinical Research Unit. This comprehensive facility is available to all College faculty for conducting clinical studies.

With constrained NIH research funding, the VA system offers an important opportunity for CoM investigators to fund their research efforts while making a difference in the lives of veterans. Melanie Cushion, PhD, Senior Associate Dean for Research, is a longtime VAMC employee, has been funded by Merit awards and is an important resource for investigators exploring VA research and funding opportunities.

I appreciate faculty who have made important contributions to the care of veterans and to academic pursuits at the VAMC. Our close proximity to the VAMC and a renewed national interest in collaborative activities between the VA and their academic health center affiliates augurs well for future partnerships across all three missions.

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