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The AAMA asks Congress to invest in health professions programs

The American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA) is working to make itself heard in Congress. In April 2014, AAMA President Nina L. Watson, CMA (AAMA), sent letters in support of funding for programs that can help future medical assistants and improve health care delivery nationwide.

Expanding the Reach of Health Services

Titles VII and VIII of the Public Health Service Act are federally funded programs intent on improving the supply and distribution of health professions and generating a supply of providers who work in medically underserved communities. Through these programs, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) provides grants to medical and other health professions schools to improve the diversity, distribution, and supply of the health professions workforce with an emphasis on primary care and interdisciplinary education and training. Unfortunately, funding of these programs is insufficient to ensure

an adequate supply of health care providers for our most vulnerable populations.

A compelling synopsis of the need for funding can be found in a report by the National Advisory Committee on Interdisciplinary, Community-Based Linkages to the Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services, and to the Congress:

The Advisory Committee believes that the primary purpose behind the Federal programs created by Title VII, Part D of the Public Health Service Act is creation of academic-community partnerships that prepare a health workforce which is responsive to the needs of the Nation. It is felt that such programs must be sensitive to the evolving system of health care delivery, the changing scope of practice for various disciplines, the socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of an increasingly diverse national population, and the ever-expanding base of scientific knowledge associated with providing the highest quality of health care in the world. The Advisory Committee also

understands that training health professionals in interdisciplinary settings leads to the most effective health care as recognized by numerous national reports, health systems, and accrediting agencies.¹

Funding has been provided by the U.S. Senate and House Appropriations Committees for the Subcommittees on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies. The fact that allied health professionals comprise more than 60 to 65 percent of the nonphysician health care workforce has been a primary driver for increasing the scope of professions represented.² As the nation prepares for current and future strains on our health care system, the need to support a broader health care workforce is all the more pressing.

Therefore, the AAMA urged the subcommittees to prioritize funding for the medical assisting profession and the other allied health professions subsumed under Title VII of the Public Health Service Act. What follows is the body of the letter AAMA President Watson sent in support of this funding:

I am writing on behalf of the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA), a national organization representing the medical assisting profession. The AAMA has over 30,000 members throughout the United States, and is the recognized voice for the medical assisting profession on federal and state issues that impact the safety and welfare of all Americans. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, the medical assisting profession is projected to be one of the fastest growing health care fields through 2022. One of the reasons for the burgeoning demand for medical assistants is the greater amount of health care that is being delivered in outpatient, primary care settings. Medical assistants work primarily in these settings, and are highly valued because of their cross training, versatility, and cultural competence in dealing with patients from varied ethnic backgrounds and cultures.

As the nation adjusts to the ramifications of President Obama's Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, medical assistants holding the CMA (AAMA) credential awarded by the Certifying Board of the AAMA are assuming additional, vital roles in the health care delivery system, such as patient advocate and health coach. Only medical assistants who have graduated from a programmatically-accredited, postsecondary medical assisting program are eligible for the CMA (AAMA) Certification Examination.

The American Association of Medical Assistants urges your subcommittee to prioritize funding for the medical assisting profession and the other allied health professions subsumed under Title VII of the Public Health Services Act. Ensuring state-of-the-art, affordable education in all allied health fields will enable the American health care delivery system to respond quickly and seamlessly to the influx of patients resulting from the Affordable Care Act. Importantly, well-

Addressing the House and Senate

Refer to the sample letters on the AAMA website under Downloads or write your own. Make sure you address the subcommittees in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. Use the following contact information and salutations when addressing your letters:

House of Representatives

The Honorable Jack Kingston, Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education
Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Ranking
Member
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education
Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kingston and Ranking Member DeLauro:

Senate

The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran, Ranking
Member
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Moran:

educated allied health professionals will enhance the cost-effectiveness as well as the capacity of the delivery system, and will assist our nation in reaching its goal of providing affordable and appropriate health care for all.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. Please let us know whether we can be of further assistance.

Because this issue has great implications for allied health educators, we have created letters specifically designed to help educators promote the interests of their programs to the fullest. We also have created sample letters for the dedicated leaders of our state societies to use. Local chapter leaders might tailor these letters for their specific needs, as well. ◀

Questions? Contact Donald A. Balasa, JD, MBA, at dbalasa@aama-ntl.org or 800/228-2262.

Influence in numbers

We encourage you to lend your voice to the AAMA and other organizations and individuals by sending your own letters. Ask for strong investment in the Title VII health professions programs.

To help expedite your efforts, we have developed sample letters and posted them to the AAMA website, under Downloads. We welcome you to use the language from these letters as presented or revise them to suit your style.

References

1. Review and recommendations: interdisciplinary, community-based linkages, Title VII, Part D, Public Health Service Act. <http://www.hrsa.gov/advisorycommittees/bhpradvisory/acicbl/Reports/firstreport.pdf>. Published November 2001. Accessed May 16, 2014.
2. Murphy DL. Workforce shortages in the allied health professions: barrier to health care access in Texas. Presented to the Texas State Senate Committee on Health and Human Services; February 23, 2010. <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/senate/commit/c610/h2010/0223-DouglasL.Murphy.pdf>. Accessed May 19, 2014.