ACOM Goes to Washington: 2014 DO Day on the Hill

Health & Anatomy in the Wiregrass

First Year in Review

Thank you to our contributing authors and the Student Communications Team!

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Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Hamilton
A sea of white coats stormed over the steps of Congress as The Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine (ACOM) sent 12 first-year medical students along with Dean Lenz to Washington D.C. for the 14th annual D.O. on the Hill Day on March 6, 2014.

More than 1,200 students, physicians and osteopathic healthcare professionals descended on the nation’s capital to discuss a wide variety of topics ranging from reimbursement reform to rural Teaching Health Centers to the impact of the Caribbean medical student influx. The ceremonies kicked off with an introduction and welcome by Representatives Joe Heck, DO (R-NV-03) and Ami Bera, MD (D-CA-07).

“Congressman Joe Heck was a great speaker,” said first-year student Anne Callen. “It was inspirational to see a DO who has taken such an active role in his community and who is advocating in Congress for osteopathic physicians. He encouraged all of us to go back to our communities and participate in the political process, and he reminded us that the people who know what's best for our profession are those who are in our profession, so it's our responsibility to speak up for DOs.”

The students also heard from current American Osteopathic Association president Norman Vinn, DO.

“My favorite speaker by far was Dr. Vinn,” said first-year osteopathic medical student Christine Dascalu. “When he stood up in front of the podium his presence was felt by all, and even though he spoke with a calm demeanor and warm voice, his message was one of strength and action: Do not lose your identities as future DOs and always stand strong and tall together!”

After arriving Wednesday evening, the students began to take in the sights of Washington, D.C. Utah native and first-year student David Murphy was even able to catch his hometown basketball team, the Utah Jazz, play the Washington Wizards at the Verizon Center. “Unfortunately, they lost,” said Murphy. Following the introduction Thursday morning, the students made their way to the Capitol building to meet with their respective state representatives. Twelve ACOM students attended (Paul Richard, Kenyanita Ellis, Chermeia Austin, Christian Park, Whitni Michael, Caitlin Gillen, Anne Callen, David Murphy, Christine Dascalu, Jasmaine Coleman, Kenny Wu and Andrew Wheat) representing the states of Alabama, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Florida, Ohio and Oregon. The topics that were commonly brought up were the repeal of the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) formula and the Teaching Health Center Reauthorization Act.

“I was the only person from ACOM representing Florida, and even better, I was the only one at the event registered in District 8!” said Dascalu. “Due to this, I had the opportunity of having a one-on-one meeting with Congressman Bill Posey of Florida. Congressman Posey spent 45 minutes with me and we discussed everything from the SGR Repeal to the Affordable Care Act to our families. My meeting with him reinforced my beliefs about the importance of educating ourselves as future physicians about legislation that will directly affect how we practice.”

Following the meetings on the Hill, the students took some time to sightsee and visit the historic landmarks of our nation’s capital. After visits to the Smithsonian and the Washington Monument, the students congregated at District Chophouse for dinner in the company of Dean Lenz.

“It was a great opportunity to see the students connecting with political representatives and students from other schools,” said Dr. Lenz. “We had a great time and worked hard. Next year we want to coordinate the academic calendar to enable more students to go. [I think] this is a very good use of curriculum time.”
The Health & Anatomy in the Wiregrass workshop series promoted knowledge about anatomy and anatomical education for educators and students. The series was hosted at the Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine over two weekends in March.

The event was coordinated and executed under the guidance of Drs. Larissa Collier and James Foster, Communications Director Sarah Senn, Anatomy Assistant Krissy Wood and Executive Assistant Katelyn Wood. The goal was two-part, and involved two separate audiences. The first workshop was directed toward educators, especially in the field of anatomical sciences, to introduce new innovative ideas to help teach anatomy to their students, as well as offer helpful resources and insight. The second workshop was geared for high school students from the Wiregrass interested in pursuing a career in the health sciences. The goal was to inform and educate the students on human anatomy and to get them excited about the intricacies of the human body and musculoskeletal medicine.

Both events were structured similarly, with a keynote speaker scheduled for the Friday night followed by an entire day of specific workshop activities geared toward the particular audience in attendance. For the educators, the keynote speaker was Dr. Valerie Dean O'Loughlin, Associate Professor of Anatomy at Indiana University School of Medicine. Dr. O'Loughlin engaged the audience with a high-energy presentation and shared her expertise on anatomical education at the undergraduate and medical levels. She was able to offer her own personal experiences and insight, and help the educators gain a new perspective by displaying techniques that she currently utilizes. Fifteen educators from five counties attended the educators' workshop. The educator's students ranged from high school all the way to college education. On Saturday, the educators were able to participate in system-specific sessions, small group discussions and hands-on activities with a prosected cadaver.

For the high school student workshop, Dr. Greg Thompson gave the keynote address. He discussed anatomy, medical school and the relationship to osteopathic medicine. On Saturday, the 30 students in attendance were split into three groups led by student volunteers from ACOM. Each group rotated through the three stations, which were all integrated and covered a similar overarching subject matter. Some of the themes included cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity.

"[We wanted] to take something they are already aware of and show them the clinical aspects of it," said Dr. Collier. The stations included a cadaver prosection, giving most of the high school students their first look at the inner anatomical structures of the human body. Students also had the opportunity to see and hold a pig's heart. In the histology station, students learned about atherosclerosis and the prevention of heart disease, diabetes and obesity. The physiology station gave students the chance to see the differences in blood pressure with and without exercise, practice taking a blood pressure and work in the simulation lab to test their new skills. After completing the three stations, all students came together for a “Health and the Wiregrass” update, where they worked in teams to evaluate patient case scenarios and present to the group. The students loved the opportunity to interact in this session.

This workshop for high school students essentially provided them with “a day in the life of a medical student” experience. This allowed students to ask questions, get a feel for what it will be like in medical school and the path to get there. By the end of the day these students that started off as strangers ended up friends and had a better understanding of anatomy and osteopathic medicine.

The American Association of Anatomists and the Southeast Alabama Medical Center Foundation generously funded the workshop series.
Student Perspective: 2014 SOMA Convention
By David Murphy

After an exciting day of talking to our representatives and walking around in and out of the Legislature buildings, it was time to get down to business to establish ACOM’s chapter of the Student Osteopathic Medical Association (SOMA). The motion was seconded, and the vote was unanimous. This vote culminated three months of organizing, constitution-writing and hard work, and resulted in quite a sigh of relief. The convention consisted of keynote speakers, workshops and free food (with the constant flow of coffee). The AOA president, Norman Vinn, DO spoke about the importance of advocacy (being the theme of this year’s convention, in conjunction with DO Day on the Hill), as well as understanding what we as DOs will bring to the field of medicine and how important it is to take advocacy to the next level. After that, we had the exhibitor mixer, with free food and free SWAG to my heart’s content! The exhibitors included everything from test preparation companies to medical suppliers, which all provide benefits to those who are SOMA members. The afternoon consisted of region meetings for all the SOMA chapter presidents and National Liaison Officers (NLOs), and two presentations for the rest of us. The first presentation explored how we as future physicians can best understand the health needs of the LGBT community, and the second explained the facets of the Affordable Care Act and how it impacts us now and in the future. After that, we toured the museums of our nation’s capital for the rest of the evening.

Anne Callen and Jasmaine Coleman (ACOM-SOMA president and NLO, respectively) attended important meetings in the SOMA House of Delegates, organizing goals and resolutions for SOMA. Additionally, there were workshops galore for us common folk. In the first workshop, we learned ultrasound-guided peripheral IV placement. The second was an EKG Interpretation and the third was a Trauma Assessment workshop. These proved to be very interesting and exciting, giving us a taste of what’s to come in our endeavors. Later, Pamela Goldman, DO gave a keynote presentation. She is a former SOMA member and active AOA member, and spoke to us about the transition from medical student to physician and how to stay involved with our profession to enrich our careers. Then, lunch at the Shake Shack!! We came back and chose one more workshop. I selected an Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment (OMT) workshop that discussed Traditional Chinese Meridians and treatment options using OMT. (I was the only ACOM student in this one. I must be a hippie.) The OMT class was very interesting, especially since we’ve just learned about Trigger and Tender points in class. The other workshop was a suture clinic, where the students learned about wound closure and practiced on a pig’s foot. I knew the suture class was a hit as well. After that, we had our Inaugural Celebration/awards ceremony/social. A perfect way to end such an amazing trip.
Meet Dr. William Hamilton. You may commonly know him as the Neuroanatomy guru with an entertaining sense of humor. We sat down with him at ACOM Beat and got his true feelings, introspective thoughts, words of wisdom, and future plans:

ACOM Beat (AB): Are you coming back next year?

Dr. Hamilton (DrH): There is a strong possibility that I will return for the Behavioral Neurosciences course next year.

AB: Tell us about a case that resonated with you.

DrH: A memorable case: Our university neurology clinic evaluated patients only by physician referral. One day, a frantic man called our office requesting to see me. Apparently two days earlier, he had gone to the ER for an evaluation. He alleged that only a cursory examination was done. No neurological studies were performed and he was given a prescription for pain medication, and sent home. On a hunch, I made an exception and crammed him into that day's clinic. On examination, I noted dysarthria, fulminate papilledema, dystaxia and dysmetria. With your training to date, what would you suspect and what would you do?

AB: <Awkward silence>

DrH: The patient had an emergency CT head scan, which revealed a large posterior fossa tumor. He went immediately to surgery. If he had not been seen he surely would have herniated in a couple of days. Moral—A good initial examination in the ER would have revealed these deficits. Always approach each patient as a challenge!

AB: What is the single most important thing you believe medical students should know?

DrH: Be an ardent lifelong-learner.

AB: If you hadn't become a neurologist, what would you have done?

DrH: I would have become a neurosurgeon. During my third year I spent a considerable amount of time with some neurosurgeons and that changed my mind drastically. I realized the procedures were long, delicate and require a combination of patience and delicateness due to the friable blood vessels and nerves. These techniques can involve very tense situations. I could see why they charge a lot. When I was going through school we did not have the technology that is available today. No MRI Tests or CT scans when I trained. Had these diagnostic tests been available I would have considered it. They certainly make the field more manageable.

AB: Do you think we will survive clinical rotations?

DrH: Yes. I am very impressed with all of the students of ACOM. Dr. Reynolds and I helped establish Troy students connections with the Andrew T. Still COM in Arizona and have had much success with students reaching their residency goals there. Additionally, I have worked for AMEC and have traveled the state with Dr. Wil Baker to visit the core sites for students’ clinical rotation years. We are very impressed with locations including: Birmingham, Mobile, Huntsville and others. I think the network is very well developed. We have even had previous students enter into neurosurgery residency. I cannot over emphasize the importance of Board scores for securing these competitive residency positions. Students we have assisted in securing these positions start from Day 1 of their second year studying for Boards, and utilize Oklahoma Notes and FirstAid. I’ll make sure to provide students with more ideas for study tools that I believe are helpful when that time comes.

AB: How are the college's research efforts coming along?

DrH: It is coming along better than I thought. The constructional plans are finished and put together. The layout and blueprints are finished. The construction companies have been compensated. We still need to get utilities established, but we are ready to move forward. We plan to have two subzero freezers—one -80 degree and one -20 degree freezer. By early Fall we may be able to get started. My goal is that we can start drug studies because these tend to be compensated very well. Currently, we are not at the point to start clinical research, but this is our goal in the very near future.
Milestones: First Year in Review

By Sarah Senn

It's been almost nine months since the Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine (ACOM) celebrated its historic grand opening, and the campus is abuzz with activity. With the medical school curriculum in full-swing, it's safe to say everyone is staying busy. Students are taking courses in anatomy, molecular medicine, osteopathic principles and practice, primary clinical skills and foundations of modern healthcare. ACOM has celebrated many milestones and events along the way. Here are a few of the highlights.

Student Orientation

ACOM developed a robust week of activities to help students jump into their first year of medical school. The week kicked off with the Grand Opening ceremony and progressed into sessions focused on the curriculum and basics of medical school. Students also learned more about ACOM's core values and developed their own culture code through an interactive exercise. Many local businesses sponsored the week's activities, which included an opening reception and vendor fair.

White Coat Ceremony

October 12th marked another historic event for ACOM and its inaugural class—White Coat Ceremony. This ceremony represents a rite of passage for a first-year medical student and an important step in the journey to becoming an osteopathic physician. The white coats presented were a gift from the Southeast Alabama Medical Center Foundation made possible through the generous donations to the What If? Capital Campaign. Clifton Meador, MD, a physician, researcher and author, gave the keynote address to the more than 800 guests in attendance.

Hospital Day

ACOM is already thinking ahead to the future by helping students learn more about residency programs and hospitals where they can continue their medical training. The college hosted its inaugural Hospital Day on November 8, 2013, to give first-year students and others from the Alabama Medical Education Consortium pipeline the opportunity to meet program directors and hospital administrators. Nearly 30 programs and hospitals came to ACOM to exhibit for the event, giving students the chance to network with programs from across the state of Alabama and beyond. This was the first of many hospital days for the college, and ACOM hopes to increase the number of exhibitors in years to come.

Students in the community

ACOM's inaugural class is finding many ways to get involved in the community. Nearly 60 ACOM students, faculty and staff participated in 2013 Sandi McCool Champions of Hope event for breast cancer as runners, walkers, cyclists and volunteers. A group of students joined the National Peanut Festival Parade, representing the college on one of Maddox Farms' horse-drawn carriages. The inaugural class also started the Jive Turkey Drive to collect food for the Wiregrass Area United Way Food Bank. ACOM was able to donate 376 lbs. of goods, providing more than 200 meals this past Thanksgiving.
Greetings, ACOM Community! The 2013-14 school year is well under way and with the opening of ACOM’s doors comes many opportunities to share new and exciting developments in the medical field. Field Focus serves as an opportunity for current students, prospective students and the community to gain knowledge into varying areas of medicine from practicing practitioners.

This month’s focus is Emergency Medicine. Keith Blanks, DO is double certified in several states in both family and emergency medicine. This June, Dr. Blanks will celebrate his 11th year in practice. He has practiced mainly in urban environments, as well as rural areas in Alabama and Georgia. We asked him some probing questions on what his life is like as a Family and Emergency physician; these are the insights he had to share:

Describe a day in the life of an Emergency Medicine doctor.

“A typical day for me if I could sum it up for you is chaotic. It's not always as it appears on television. However, at times it can be close and sometimes worse because you are experiencing it. My day can have swells of incoming patients where staff is not always able to keep up with the demand which can lead to longer wait times. We have to prioritize and triage and see the more severe patients first. From acute heart attacks to stroke patients to trauma patients. I constantly have to multitask throughout my day to maximize care. At the end of the day I'm truly ready to go home. However, with almost every shift I complete, I feel good in knowing that I made a difference or had an impact on someone's life and well-being.”

What perks/drawbacks would you say are involved with being a practicing physician in your field?

“Emergency Medicine provides me with a host of perks. I get to do procedures which I enjoy. My schedule allows me to only have to work about 14 or 15 shifts a month. This allows me time to be with my family. The income is good. Most companies or hospitals will pay your malpractice insurance. Depending on being an employee vs. independent contractor, you are provided a good benefits package with retirement, CME, etc. Also, one of the biggest perks in my opinion is having no direct overhead. Staff and supplies are paid for through a hospital or company budget which doesn't directly come out of your pocket. Emergency medicine is extremely stressful. Having to participate in “shift” work, will cause you to have to work days, nights, mid shifts, etc. This can cause an impact on your body. Many emergency medicine physicians “burn out” after several years. That’s why it is imperative to communicate with your family and friends. You have to take care of yourself. Eating correctly, exercising, getting adequate sleep, and not overworking yourself are imperative. Another drawback is that you can't please everybody. Your patients may have to wait long hours and by the time they finally see you they are not happy. Sometimes no matter what you do, you may not be appreciated. It can be a thankless job at times. “

What's your favorite story to share about being a resident in your field?

“When I was a resident, there were no work hour restrictions in place. So I had worked a particular New Year’s Eve and was on call. I had no sleep. The entire ED and hospital was overflowing. We had multiple traumas called, including motor vehicle collisions, gunshot victims, stabbing victims. You name it, we had it. We even had patients fighting staff because they were under the influence of drugs. We had a family member fighting with EMS staff. Police were around having to use the taser guns numerous times. It felt like hell breaking loose. I had to work throughout the night and the next morning. I pulled 36 straight hours. I literally was praying to get home because I was so tired. I can still remember how euphoric I felt lying down after that shift.”

What advice would you give medical students selecting a specialty?

“Strive for the specialty that sparks your interest. Don't go for what your buddy may do. Don't go into what your parent may practice. Select what will allow you to wake up and be excited about doing day-in and day-out. I am happy because that's what I do. However, I see many doctors who seem very unhappy with their lives. So really think hard about what you would like to do. Consider your possible schedule. Consider your work environment. Consider your family and finances. Ask as many questions as you can to physicians in those fields.”

Dr. Blanks currently practices emergency medicine in both Columbus and Fayetteville, Ga. areas.

Field Focus is an ongoing series by The ACOM Beat
Tri-State BBQ Festival
When: April 11th - 10AM, April 12th - 10AM - 6PM
Where: Houston County Farm Center
Cost: $10 for day pass, $5 for students/military, children under 6 are FREE!
Contact: www.TriStateBBQ.com

BBQ’s, a car show and SWAMP PEOPLE’s Bruce Mitchell highlight the 9th annual Tri-State BBQ Festival. This family friendly event includes local vendors, pony rides, and a huge obstacle course for the children.

WoodStrong Farm Challenge 5k & Fun Run
When: April 12th @ 7:30AM
Where: Maddox Farm
Cost: $65 adults, $25 juniors
Register: www.woodstrong.me
Contact: www.woodstrong.me or 334-435-9067

The WoodStrong Farm Challenge is a 5k trail run with mild obstacles along beautiful farm landscapes, winding creeks and thick mature forests. Racers will run through creeks, through muddy tracts, up and over hills and will experience a few other surprises along the 5k terrain. Come see the Clydesdales; farm tours and trail rides will take place following the runs!

Toadlick Music Festival
Start Date: April 24th
End Date: April 26th
Where: National Peanut Festival Fairgrounds
Cost: $109 for 3 day pass (sorry, no 1 day passes)
Contact: (334) 699-LICK or www.toadlick.com

Multi-platinum artists The Band Perry, Billy Currington and the legendary Merle Haggard headline the 3rd annual Toadlick Music Festival. Activities in addition to music include the Miss Toadlick Pageant, and a food drive for the United Way Food Bank. collapsible coolers allowed, BYOB.

Thunder on Tholocco
When: April 26th @ 11AM
Where: Lake Tholocco
Cost: $5 advance, $7 at the gate
More Info:
Contact: www.ftruckermwr.com/special-events/

Multi-class outboard drag boat racing, wakeboarding demonstrations throughout the day. Sign up to participate in a kayak or canoe race, paddle boats, or inflatable slip and slide. Food vendors will be on site.

Superhero Run to Prevent Child Abuse
When: April 26th @ 8AM
Where: Westgate Tennis Center
Cost: $20 for registration and shirt, $15 without shirt
Registration: www.exchange-cap.com
Contact: Cindy Watt or Pam Miles (334) 671-1966

This is going to be fun event for children and adults, and a great opportunity to demonstrate that EVERYONE can be a SUPERHERO for a child! Proceeds for this fun run benefit the Exchange Center’s mission to prevent child abuse and family violence through counseling, in-home support, and prevention education services.

Restaurant Spotlight: Basketcase Café

Hours: Serving lunch Mon – Fri, 11 – 2PM
Info: Don’t let the modest décor and small town vibe fool you. Located in downtown Dothan, Basketcase Café is a delightful local eatery that serves a mixture of tasty deli sandwiches, hearty pasta dishes and fresh salads.
Menu Item to Try: the peanut butter pie – simply mouthwatering