

Situation

The Association of Anesthesiology Core Program Directors (AACPD) is concerned about challenges that graduating residents experience transitioning from residency to fellowships that begin on July 1.

Background

The AACPD and Association of Anesthesiology Subspecialty Program Directors (AASPD) Councils have had ongoing discussions about potential flexibility for fellowship start date for several years without a formal proposal to move forward with implementation. Several specialties (i.e., orthopedic surgery, general surgery, and obstetrics and gynecology) have successfully implemented August 1 start dates for fellowships. The challenges with July 1 start dates for fellowships include:

- 1) **Effective Completion of residency training:** In order to start fellowship programs on July 1, graduating residents may have to move, sometimes large distances. Many residents achieve this through terminal vacation, resulting in clinical coverage concerns for the residency program and can also cause undue stress to graduating residents and programs alike. Inversely, if institutional orientation for fellowship is prior to July 1, this can result in credentialing issues if these individuals are in two training programs (residency and fellowship) simultaneously.
- 2) **ABA Advanced Examination:** The ABA ADVANCED Examination is administered annually in July and is a required examination prior to proceeding to the APPLIED examination required for board certification. The timing of this exam means fellows who begin their training program on July 1 are challenged with studying for this examination while trying to onboard focus on the clinical and didactic content of their fellowship program. This has the potential to negatively impact ABA certification, early success in the fellowship, or both.
- 3) **Trainee Preference/Timing of Graduation:** Graduating anesthesiology residents may prefer to take time between their two training programs. Similarly, depending on residency start date and/or any leaves during residency training, they may be unable to start a fellowship program on July 1.

Assessment

Advantages of a non-July 1 start date for fellowship include:

- 1) Allows residents to complete their final year of residency training without the need to take terminal vacation/leave and provides adequate time for physical moves and any associated fellowship orientation
- 2) Affords graduates the opportunity for unopposed study time ABA ADVANCED Examination
- 3) Experienced fellows at the end of their fellowship training will be present in July when new residents are beginning training. This allows for both optimal allocation of educational resources and improved support/educational experiences for incoming residents.

Challenges of a non-July 1 start date for fellowships include:

1. **Year 1 implementation:** With the first year of implementation, there will be a gap in the number of fellows for the month of July. This is particularly challenging for those programs who rely heavily on fellows for clinical service, including on-call activities. Other specialties have navigated this through innovative scheduling approaches including staggering the non July 1 start date over consecutive years.

2. A gap in salary/benefits may pose a challenge for trainees and can present another obstacle towards subspecialty training.
3. Consideration must also be given to trainees on visas, especially those on J-1 visas. Currently, there is no regulatory provision to allow ECFMG-sponsored trainees to extend sponsorship to cover a 30-day gap between programs however the U.S. Department of State has allowed trainees in other specialties (i.e., general surgery) to seek to maintain J-1 status during the gap between training programs.

Plan

The AACPD strongly supports a flexible start date (non July 1) for fellowship training in anesthesiology and seeks AASPD support for this proposal. As the AASPD Council, we encourage fellowship program leadership to strongly consider a trainee-centric approach and offer an August 1 start date.