

MD/PhD Advisory Group Meeting Minutes

Date: Wednesday, August 20, 2014
Called to Order: 2:00 p.m.
Location: Biomedical Research Center 1, Room B300
Presiding: William D. Wessinger, Ph.D.
Present: Drs. Giulia Baldini, Larry Cornett, David Davies, Ling Gao, John Greenfield, Stavros Manolagas, Robert McGehee, Sara Shalin, Tom South and William D. Wessinger

Dr. Wessinger presented an overview of the MD/PhD program. Students are accepted into the program prior to starting medical school, or in their first or second year of medical school (M1, M2). The typical progression is spend two years in medical school (M1, M2), then after passing the Step 1 board exam, they enter graduate school for 3–4 years (G1, G2, G3...). After completing their dissertation research they return to complete their medical school training (M3, M4).

Scholarships are currently \$24,134/year and cover medical-school tuition. MD/PhD students are in the Interdisciplinary Biomedical Sciences Graduate Program and can do their graduate work with any funded investigator who is a member of the UAMS Graduate Faculty. During the research-training phase students are supported with a stipend (\$24,000/year) and their graduate school tuition is paid from their research mentor's grant(s). The mentor's department signs an agreement that they will cover the stipend and tuition should the mentor's funding run out. The student pays student fees, unless grant funding is available to cover fees; for example, fees are an allowable expense on NRSA Individual Fellowships and Institutional Training Grants.

For the 2014-2015 Academic Year there are 19 students; 12 in medical school and 7 in graduate school. Due to decreased NIH funding on campus and concerns about finding viable research opportunities during the research-training phase, the MD/PhD program has cut back on the number of students from it's record high of 24. Faculty should not take a student unless they can cover the stipend and tuition for 3–4 years.

The success rate for obtaining training fellowships among MD/PhD students remains quite high. All MD/PhD students are required to submit training fellowship applications. Of the current 19 students: 1 has a American Foundation for Pharmaceutical Education Fellowship, 3 have been supported with T32 Institutional Fellowships (1 from Psychiatry's "Addictions Research" Training Grant and 2 from the Systems Pharmacology and Toxicology (SPaT) Training Grant), 2 have NRSA Individual Fellowships. That is a 32% funding rate. In addition, 2 M1 students had summer Fellowships from the Addictions Research Training Grant.

A history of MD/PhD graduates was presented. Since 2007 there have been 20 graduates with the dual MD/PhD degrees. Dr. Wessinger will send the committee a list of where the graduates are currently in their careers. Dr. Stavros stressed the importance of retaining the graduates at UAMS.

Student concerns are: want more contact with Physician-Scientists, length of training, transitions from med to grad and grad to med, visibility on campus through website, yearbook and representation on the ASG.

A Clinical Transitions Course proposal has been submitted to the Graduate Counsel for review and approval. This course aims to maintain and reemphasize medical knowledge and clinical skills for the students during Graduate School. The goals and objectives are similar to those of other nationally recognized programs:

1. Improve students' comfort in clinical settings,
2. Improve students' comfort and proficiency in performing specific clinical and/or procedural skills,
3. Provide opportunities for students to practice clinical skills and receive feedback,
4. Introduce new knowledge and skills that students will use in clerkships,
5. Facilitate the transition from graduate school back to medical school.

Students enrolled in the MD/PhD Clinical Transitions course will engage in a variety of clinical activities for a minimum of 16 hours each semester enrolled. Dr. Graham James has agreed to serve as the course director; he will assist students in identifying qualifying activities. Qualifying activities can include, but are not limited to, the following examples:

- Shadowing a physician (at UAMS, or elsewhere)
- Volunteering at the UAMS Emergency Department and other clinical centers
- Attending Clinical Skills Center with M1s to maintain proficiency taking histories and performing physical exams
- Attending Practice of Medicine (POM) lectures with M2s to maintain knowledge base; assisting POM Clinical Faculty Advisors
- Participating in activities at the UAMS or ACH Simulation Center
- Taking POM online clinical refresher classes.
- Volunteering at Harmony Health Clinic
- Volunteering at 12th Street Health and Wellness Center
- Participation in Interprofessional Education Activities
- Other activities can be used upon approval of the Course Director

Student evaluation in the Clinical Transitions Course are pass/fail based on participation. Student hours will be logged into Blackboard as a course blog entry. They must log 16 hours of participation each year. A blog style entry will create an air of creativity and sharing of ideas.

Ensuing discussion included: Concern over paying for the student from a grant while logging these course hours. This falls under training and is allowable for all grants per Dr. McGehee. Transitioning from graduate to medical school creates a lot of anxiety, but few real problems. Peer mentoring helps by keeping the students together as a group. Vertical integration keeps them talking. Dr. Greenfield suggested the students do clinics one day a month with a clinical mentor. Dr. Manolagas thinks it critical the student have a clinical home.

Student activities include monthly luncheons with presentations by physician-scientist, presentation of research results at an annual research symposium for students who are past candidacy, the annual Students' Choice Seminar, and rotations. It is strongly recommended for incoming students to do a summer rotation before the start of the M1 year. Summer rotation students are encouraged to find a laboratory that can afford to provide a stipend during summer training.

Miscellaneous discussion items included the following topics:

- NRSA Applications: Students are required to write and defend a training proposal for their candidacy exam. Most complete their candidacy requirement during the G1 or G2 years; some students submit an NRSA proposal before then.
- Questions arose concerning how many post residency MD/PhD's stayed at or returned to UAMS and what is the cost to the institution. How are we enticing them to stay in our residency program, how do we entice them back after an away residency?
- In order to be competitive for an MSTP, deep institutional commitment must be shown by giving the medical students stipends as soon as they walk through the door.

Ideas for the program: have a yearly reunion to bring alumni back to UAMS, find out what other programs are doing and do not make their mistakes, keep track of graduates for the application process, make a separate MD/PhD Facebook page, make them feel like an MD/PhD from day one through the whole program, have senior students come back to judge research symposium. Medical students that start medical school with a Ph.D. fall under the MD/PhD umbrella and should be invited to MD/PhD activities. There are more quality applicants than positions. Admissions could inform us of students who enter the medical school with a Ph.D.

Dr. Wessinger requested volunteers to interview MD/PhD applicants on October 4, November 1, December 13, 2014 and January 10, 2015.

The Committee agreed to meet twice a year.