

Subject: Subcommittee Field Hearing on Modernized Health Care in Practice: Empowering Americans to Live Healthier Lives

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Bradenton, Florida

Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and to share the work of the Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine (LECOM). I serve as the Dean of Academic Affairs at LECOM Bradenton. I began my medical career as a Physician Assistant (PA) and practiced in pediatric transplant surgery at Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh, then graduated from LECOM Erie, PA in 2000. I completed a Family Medicine residency at Millcreek Community Hospital, now LECOM Medical Center. As I began my residency, I was asked to develop and teach history and physical examination for a new curriculum pathway LECOM started, called Problem Based Learning. After teaching part time for 7 years, I returned to LECOM full time to bring that history and physical examination curriculum into the entire school.

It is an honor to contribute to this important conversation about how public policy can support healthier lives, modern medical training, and innovative care delivery for the American people.

At LECOM, our mission is clear: to prepare the next generation of healthcare professionals through excellence in education, research, clinical care, and community service, with the goal of improving health outcomes for all humanity. This mission is not abstract and is reflected daily in how we educate our students, care for patients, and partner with communities.

Advancing Health Through Innovative Medical Education

LECOM was founded in response to a national need for more physicians and a more responsive model of medical education. From its earliest days, the institution has embraced innovation— not as a buzzword, but as a practical necessity to meet workforce shortages and evolving patient needs through our College of Medicine and Schools of Dental Medicine, Pharmacy, Podiatry and Health Services Administration.

One of the most distinctive elements of LECOM’s approach is its commitment to student-centered and flexible learning pathways. Unlike traditional one-size-fits-all models, LECOM

offers multiple educational pathways, including Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Lecture-Discussion Pathway (LDP), Directed Study Pathway and distance education models. These pathways empower students to learn in ways that mirror real-world clinical problem-solving, fostering adaptability, critical thinking, and lifelong learning.

Problem-based Learning, in particular, places students in small groups where they collaboratively analyze clinical cases, mirroring how physicians diagnose and treat patients. This model promotes not only knowledge acquisition but also teamwork, communication, and critical reasoning: skills essential for modern healthcare delivery.

LECOM has pioneered accelerated and cost-conscious medical education pathways, helping to reduce student debt while maintaining rigorous academic standards including offering three accelerated pathways; Primary Care Scholars Pathway for those students dedicated to primary care specialties, the Accelerated Physician Assistant Pathway for PA's who seek to become physicians, the only program of its kind in the US, and the Accelerated Pharmacy Pathway. All three of these pathways allow completion of medical school and pharmacy school in three, instead of the traditional four years.

By lowering financial barriers, we enable more students, especially those from underserved communities, to pursue healthcare careers and return, serving in the communities they trained in.

Connecting Education to Community Health

At its core, LECOM's educational philosophy is grounded in the osteopathic principle of treating the whole person—mind, body, and spirit. This holistic approach aligns closely with national priorities to maintain healthy lifestyles, improve preventive care, address chronic disease, and reduce healthcare disparities.

Our programs emphasize primary care, community engagement, and service learning. Students are trained not only in clinical excellence but also in professionalism, ethics, and compassionate care. Many of our graduates go on to practice in rural and underserved areas, communities that are often most affected by physician shortages.

LECOM also integrates interprofessional education across its schools of medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, and health services administration. This team-based approach prepares graduates to work collaboratively across disciplines, improving care coordination and patient outcomes.

Building a Modern Healthcare Workforce

The United States faces a critical need for a larger, more diverse, and better-prepared healthcare workforce. LECOM addresses this challenge through both scale and innovation.

As the largest medical college in the nation, LECOM has expanded access to medical education while maintaining a strong focus on quality and outcomes. Following out tenants of Osteopathic Medicine recognizing the body as comprised of mind, body and spirit, our holistic admissions processes go beyond grades and performance on qualifying examinations to look at all aspects of the applicant.

In fact, LECOM is one of only a handful of medical schools that has an alternative to the MCAT, the LECOM Academic Index Score, allowing applicants to apply and be admitted without an MCAT. This approach has led us to exceptional board outcomes and residency placements consistently 99.4 to 100% for our graduates year after year.

Our programs are designed to produce not only physicians, but also pharmacists, dentists, podiatrists, and healthcare administrators who can lead in a rapidly evolving healthcare system.

Importantly, LECOM emphasizes evidence-based practice, research, and continuous quality improvement. Students are encouraged to engage in scholarly activity and develop the skills necessary to adapt to new technologies, treatments, and care models.

Through advanced programs such as doctoral training in medical education, LECOM is also preparing the next generation of academic leaders who will shape the future of healthcare education and policy.

Innovative Care Delivery and Academic Health Systems

LECOM's impact extends beyond the classroom through its integrated academic health system. LECOM Health combines education with patient care, creating a model where students learn in real-world clinical environments while contributing to community health.

This integrated system emphasizes cost-effective, patient-centered care and clinical innovation, ensuring that healthcare delivery is both high-quality and accessible. By aligning education with service, LECOM creates a feedback loop in which training programs directly respond to community health needs.

This model is particularly relevant as policymakers consider how to improve care delivery while controlling costs. Academic health systems like LECOM demonstrate that it is possible to train providers, deliver care, and innovate simultaneously benefiting both patients and the broader healthcare system.

Public Policy and the Path Forward

The work of institutions like LECOM highlights several opportunities for policymakers:

- Support for innovative medical education models that reduce costs and expand access

- Focus on preventive health care rather than reactive care
- Investment in primary care and underserved communities
- Encouragement of interprofessional and team-based training
- Strengthening academic health systems that integrate education and care delivery

Public policy plays a critical role in enabling institutions to scale these innovations. By aligning incentives with outcomes—such as improved population health, reduced costs, and workforce expansion—we can build a healthcare system that better serves all Americans.

Conclusion

In closing, LECOM stands as an example of how innovative education, community engagement, and integrated care delivery can come together to improve lives. Our mission—to enhance the quality of life through improved health—is not just an institutional statement; it is a daily commitment shared by our students, faculty, and healthcare professionals.

We are proud to contribute to the health of communities here in Florida and across the nation. We look forward to continuing to work with policymakers to ensure that every American has access to high-quality, compassionate, and effective healthcare.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.