Osteopathic medical school applicants: Will their numbers rise or fall?

For the past few years, spring has been a time of prediction for the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medical Application Service (AACOMAS), an integral part of the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM). The projected number of applicants proves important as a planning tool for both the colleges of osteopathic medicine (COMs) and the osteopathic medical profession in general. In the future, we must focus our concern on the attractiveness of the practice of osteopathic medicine (and medicine in general) as a career choice. One basic consideration is whether the number of applicants to the COMs will rise, fall, or remain stable.

Historically, a gradual decline in the number of applicants to both osteopathic and allopathic medical schools began in the late 1970s, reaching the lowest level in 1987. Since that time, however, a significant increase in the number of applicants has occurred. Now, we must consider whether this growth curve has reached a plateau for osteopathic medicine. There were 10,781 applicants for the 1996 entering class, causing AACOMAS to process the largest number of applications ever. For the entering class of 1997, that number fell to 10,764. If we have reached a plateau, what happens to the number of applications received during the next few years will have a direct impact on planning for the COMs.

Several factors should be considered when looking into our crystal ball for answers. Recent reports by the Institute of Medicine, the Council on Graduate Medical Education, and the Pew Health Professions Commission all predict a physician surplus in the near future. The Consensus Statement endorsed by AACOM and the American Osteopath-

ic Association, along with four other large organizations, predicts this same surplus. These reports, coupled with abundant documented evidence of physicians not being able to find employment in their specialty area, will have some impact on potential applicants. How much of an impact, however, remains to be seen.

At this time, our best estimate is that the number of applicants will remain at current levels for another year or two and then start to decline, probably stabilizing at approximately 9000 applicants. Will this decline affect plans the profession or the individual schools may have for any level of expansion? Probably not, if our predictions hold true as recent applicants have been well qualified. However, if a large drop off in the number of applicants does occur, some, if not a number of, COMs may need to revise their planning. ♦

Douglas L. Wood

President
American Association of Colleges
of Osteopathic Medicine
Chevy Chase, Md

Advertisers' index

Bayer Corporation
Adalat CC, 273, 274

Botsford General Hospital, 261

Deborah Heart and Lung, 261

Douglas Laboratories, 260

Forest Laboratories
Esgic Plus, 283a, 283b

Gebauer Company
Fluori-Methane, 257

Janssen Pharmaceutica
Sporanox-Onychomycosis,
251-256

Knoll Pharmaceutical Company
Vicoprofen, 299, 300

Pfizer Laboratories
Norvasc, 246

G. D. Searle & Company
Covera, 249, 250

SmithKline Beecham
Orasure, 259

St. Francis Inc., 266

University of Medicine and
Dentistry of New Jersey, 265

University of North Texas
Health Science Center at Fort
Worth, 266

Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories
Lodine, Cover 2, 243, 244

Zeneca Pharmaceuticals
Accolate, Cover 3, Cover 4
Sular, 263, 264