

Family Medicine Updates



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ADVANCING POCUS PROFICIENCY IN FAMILY MEDICINE EDUCATORS: A COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW OF THE STFM FM POCUS EDUCATOR CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

Summary

The STFM FM POCUS Educator Certificate Program presents a strategic initiative to elevate proficiency in Point-of-Care Ultrasound (POCUS) among family medicine educators. This 5-year SMART initiative aims to train 75 educators, ensuring each POCUS workshop is consistently filled beyond 90%, and achieving a high satisfaction rate of over 85% among module completers. The program anticipates that more than 80% of certificate participants will integrate the POCUS curriculum within a year of completion.

Certificate Program Overview

The certificate program uniquely emphasizes not only POCUS training but also pedagogical strategies for effective POCUS instruction. Combining hands-on experiences with online learning, the program supports faculty in navigating institutional credentialing processes. Participants engage in 3 POCUS workshops, complete a series of teaching-focused and content-based POCUS modules, and benefit from mentorship, image portfolio reviews, and a comprehensive assessment at program completion.

Certificate Requirements

1. Workshop component: attend 3 POCUS workshops
2. Online modules: complete STFM teaching-focused and content-based POCUS modules
3. Mentorship: engage with assigned POCUS mentors virtually
4. Image portfolio: upload images for feedback
5. Assessment: successfully pass written and in-person skills exams
6. Timeline: enrollment application window for POCUS opens Nov 27, 2023. First cohort begins April 2024.

Target Audience

This program is designed for family medicine faculty at residency programs.

Certificate Knowledge Objectives

Upon completion, participants will master essential aspects of POCUS, including utility and scope, application basics, clinical indications, limitations, overcoming barriers, billing and credentialing, curriculum implementation, effective preceptorship, imaging informatics, and communication/documentation strategies. The program ensures a comprehensive understanding of different ultrasound devices, including hand-helds.

The STFM FM POCUS Educator Certificate Program emerges as a pivotal resource, poised to empower family medicine educators in delivering high-quality POCUS instruction within their respective programs.

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THE CHALLENGES OF EXTERNAL LETTERS FOR PROMOTION: ACADEMIC FAMILY MEDICINE'S ATTEMPTS TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE

Academic promotion to the Associate Professor and Professor rank has traditionally required external letters of review from colleagues who are not personally connected to the individual being considered for promotion ("arm's length"). Helping our family medicine colleagues achieve academic promotion is important. While we believe that the faculty promotion process ought to be rigorous, the "arm's-length" letter of review is both burdensome and out of date. This process creates numerous challenges and inefficiencies for both those seeking promotion as well as those attempting to support their colleagues. Members of both ADFM and STFM have requested support for some of the nuanced challenges created by this process. Below, we describe ADFM and STFM strategies to support their memberships with these challenges, as well as an idea to consider for institutional advocacy.

The Challenge of Finding Enough People Willing to Write External Letters

The idea of creating a sort of "letter writers' bureau" has been raised several times over recent years to STFM. A similar structure exists in emergency medicine.¹ In the spring of 2022, STFM agreed to pilot a voluntary letter writers' bureau, modeled after the emergency medicine example, through the STFM Faculty Development Collaborative. To date, 69 individuals have volunteered to write letters through the letter

writer's bureau. STFM is currently surveying pilot members about their participation.

The Challenge of Fairly Sharing the Burden

At the 2020 ADFM conference, a small group gathered to discuss the challenge of recruiting letters of support for academic promotion—specifically how it often falls on chairs to find multiple arms'-length letter writers. In response, ADFM queried our membership about the extent of this challenge for them. On the 2020 Annual Survey ($n = 94$, 57% response rate), 77 departments (82%) said their institutional promotion process require external "arm's-length" review letters. Of those 77 departments, most requests were sent by the chair (48, 62%) though about one-third were sent by someone at the school/university (22, 29%).

After this, ADFM created a virtual space and listserve for those interested in collaborating on this faculty promotions/letter writing challenge. The initial engagement was limited, however, so in summer 2021, we put out a call for anyone interested in coming together to brainstorm solutions. Ideas from this group included creating a form where departments could both sign up for letter writing requests and offer to write (a "swap" style), sharing templates, and ways to advocate internally in our institutions to change the promotion requirements. Due to logistical constraints and a lack of data on the scope of the issue, the additional ideas have not been implemented; however, the ADFM Board did advise that more data be gathered and continue to consider the challenge.

On our 2023 survey ($n = 70$, 43% response) we asked some follow-up questions about the number of required external letters, people contacted, and faculty up for promotion. Taken together, and extrapolating based on the response rate, there are approximately 500 faculty members up for promotion in a given year in family medicine who require external letters for promotion. It takes an average of 7 contacts to get 1 letter, and an average of 3 letters are required. This means that over 10,000 requests for external letters might be sent just in the discipline of family medicine in a given year.

Making Sure Those Who Agree to Write External Letters Deliver Appropriate Letters

Given the institution-specific criteria required in each letter for promotion, an additional challenge is that some letter writers may not write a letter with the required information, or in the correct format, which might delay the promotion process. In early 2021, STFM launched their Virtual Coaching program, and included an option for portfolio review and promotion letter writing to help address some of these challenges. STFM members who are interested in being a coach or receiving coaching can learn more at: <https://connect.stfm.org/virtualcoaching4/getstarted>

An Alternative for Consideration

The main intent of the external letter is to have someone who does not know the individual up for promotion assess

whether they believe the person meets the criteria and whether they would be promoted to a similar rank at their own institution. The substantial amount of time required to review a long dossier and then distill it into a multi-page document that speaks to the institution's specific promotion criteria is an excessively burdensome way to answer these questions.

What if instead of asking for this time consuming "book report"-style letter, the institution instead requested a yes/no answer to the question: "Would this person be promoted similarly at your institution?" This question could be accompanied by an optional comment box that allowed for no more than a short paragraph.

To take this idea further, what if medical schools adopted a policy whereby they only asked for the answer to this question and in kind, their faculty were only allowed to supply the answer to this one question, when asked for an arm's-length recommendation? Would this make such a policy contagious, saving time for those doing outreach to find letter writers, those writing the letters, and the Faculty Promotions Committee who really just need a single question answered? Recognizing that the promotions policies of a university are not within control of a department of family medicine, but that this is a real issue for many of our members and ostensibly those in other disciplines as well, this potential approach to internal advocacy is an idea we share for consideration. Changing requirements for "arm's-length" letters for promotion could ultimately save our members hundreds of hours of time each year, time they could be spending doing important work that is meaningful to students and patients.

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References

1. Academy for Women in Academic Emergency Medicine. <https://community.saem.org/communities/community-home?CommunityKey=58595efd-f39b-45ac-93b4-398646d11f4f>



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INDIVIDUALIZED LEARNING PLANS: WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, AND HOW?

Individualized learning plans (ILPs) are increasingly being integrated into graduate medical education (GME). The most recent Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) Program Requirements for GME in family medicine state that the program director (PD), at least annually and with input from the Clinical Competency Committee (CCC), must systematically provide faculty guidance to