February 5, 2021

This guidance supplements the guidance for Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (COMs) related to the use of distance education due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic published previously on March 11, May 15, and May 21, 2020.

As noted previously, last year the United State Department of Education waived normal requirements and allowed the use of distance education in responding to COVID-19 without going through the regular accreditation process for distance education, and the Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation (COCA) acted to allow such use of distance education by the COMs. The most recent extension of the waiver covered payment periods beginning on or before December 31, 2020.


The COCA likewise extends its allowance for COMs to make use of that distance education waiver for the same time period. The national emergency was declared on March 13, 2020, and in the absence of additional government action affecting the duration of the national emergency, it will “terminate on the anniversary of the declaration of that emergency,” 50 U.S.C. § 1622(d), or September 9, 2021.

In 2020 the COCA sought and received an expansion of the COCA’s scope of recognition from the Department to include distance education. To the extent that COMs plan to continue to use some amount of distance education following the expiration of the waiver period, recent guidance from the Department clarifies that an institution that offers any portion of a program via distance education must be approved to offer distance education by its accrediting agency. See Department of Education Guidance on Accreditation and Eligibility Requirements for Distance Education, OPE-Accreditation-01192021-02, https://ifap.ed.gov/sites/default/files/attachments/2021-01/DistanceEducationAccreditationAttachment.pdf. The COCA will provide additional details shortly regarding the steps by which COMs can be approved by the COCA to offer distance education.

If you have specific questions related to your COM, please contact the COCA staff directly at predoc@osteopathic.org or by calling (312) 202-8124.