January 17, 2011

Jay Sexter, PhD, CEO
Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine
230 West 125th Street, Suite #327
New York, NY, 10027

Dear Dr. Sexter,

The Missouri Association of Osteopathic Physicians and Surgeons (MAOPS) appreciates the opportunity to submit a letter of comment regarding the proposed establishment of the Homer G. Phillips College of Osteopathic Medicine in St. Louis, Missouri. The osteopathic physician community in St. Louis appreciated your visit in November and voiced their qualified support of the school and its students were it to be built in St. Louis. The MAOPS Board of Trustees and membership at-large have provided feedback in regards to the proposed school. While we certainly appreciate the concept of a new osteopathic school in the Ville neighborhood of St. Louis, we have some serious concerns regarding the establishment of new osteopathic medical schools nationwide. These concerns will be discussed in more depth below.

**Issue #1: Student Rotations**

In order for any new school to be successful, student rotations must be in place for the first class. You expressed that you felt that this would not be an issue and if you were unable to establish rotations, you would not build the school in St. Louis. We concur with your position. However, we also want to express our concern about the quality of any student rotations established. Osteopathic student rotations are generally hosted by preceptors, rather than clinical faculty whose job is to train medical students. Osteopathic preceptors take on this responsibility mostly out of the goodness of their heart and dedication to the profession. While these physicians have the best of intentions, they also have a very busy work schedule with little dedicated time for the students. As one of our members eloquently put it, “preceptors, by their nature as private practitioners, are devoted to seeing as many patients as the needs of their community demands. Preceptors have only altruism as an incentive to take bits of time from their packed day to teach in snippets.” For this reason, preceptor rotations are not a reliable form of rotation learning and osteopathic training suffers. In short, although student rotations may be confirmed, our concern is that the quality of the educational experience is not what it should be.

**Issue #2: Post-graduate training**

Probably the greatest concern shared by the MAOPS membership is that of quality post-graduate osteopathic training. This past year, osteopathic medical schools matriculated 5,500 students. Currently there are only about 2,500 osteopathic training slots available. This forces osteopathic students into ACGME training programs. Connections to osteopathic medicine are
weakened. Often these osteopathic physicians never return to the osteopathic family, but participate in allopathic associations and events. Currently, ACGME spots are in abundance and osteopathic physicians are able to enter them freely. However, new allopathic institutions are expanding and they will require more of the ACGME slots. If we graduate osteopathic physicians, and no training slots are available, we do a disservice to the profession and the students who have paid dearly in time and money to enter the profession. Establishing OGME positions is currently more difficult than starting a new school. We must think toward the future and recognize that it is unethical to establish more osteopathic schools knowing that osteopathic training positions are already greatly below what is needed and osteopathic graduates will be forced to enter allopathic training programs.

**Issue #3: The Proposed School’s Name**

Although Homer G. Phillips, according to Harold Crumpton, was a hero to the St. Louis African American community, the hospital that bore his name was not friendly to osteopathic physicians. Several of our members have concerns with the school being named after a hospital that historically did not allow them to practice medicine within its walls. They have no issue with Homer G. Phillips, only the connotation the name brings due to its use by a non-osteopathic hospital.

**Issue #4: The Location of the Proposed School**

Although members have expressed concern about the safety of faculty and students in the Ville neighborhood of St. Louis, consensus is that St. Louis in general would be one of the best locations in the state to locate a new osteopathic school. Missouri already has six medical schools, two being in St. Louis, but neither are osteopathic schools.

**Issue #5: The Leadership of the Proposed School**

MAOPS believes that the leadership of any osteopathic medical school, including all deans, should have a strong background in osteopathic medicine. Rumors have implied that a chiropractor could be a dean, CEO, or President of the Homer G. Phillips College of Osteopathic Medicine. Osteopathic physicians still fight the “identity battle” with the public regarding the differences between their practice of medicine and a chiropractor’s much more limited scope. The public is often confused by this and MAOPS believes that the “faces” of the school need to be faces that represent the osteopathic profession, not faces that could lead to even more confusion about the credentials of osteopathic physicians.

In conclusion, our organization feels that opening a new medical school ANYWHERE in the country is an unwise decision at this time. As mentioned above, OGME training slots are already greatly exceeded by the number of osteopathic graduates. ACGME training slots, while available, may not be as accessible to osteopathic graduates in the near future as new allopathic institutions open and require more slots for their graduates. Even if new osteopathic residency positions were established, opening a new school would only add to the total number needed by the profession. New slots should be used to accommodate current osteopathic graduates that are currently forced to enter allopathic residency programs. We also have concerns that someone with a background and knowledge of this issue in the osteopathic profession would propose a new osteopathic medical school. We feel this shows apathy towards the future of osteopathic physicians and the profession.
Would MAOPS and the osteopathic community of St. Louis support a new school if it were opened in St. Louis? Absolutely. We would want to help ensure that the graduates of the school were highly trained and competent physicians worthy of the title, "D.O." However, we do not feel that a new school should be considered anywhere in the country until the training issues discussed above are fixed.

Sincerely,


Kevin P. Hubbard, DO, FACOI
President
Missouri Association of Osteopathic Physicians and Surgeons

Cc:
American Osteopathic Association (AOA)
Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation (COCA)
Karen Nichols, DO, AOA President
Martin Levine, DO, AOA President-elect
Association of Osteopathic State Executive Directors (AOSED)