



Department of Medicine
Division of Diabetes
55 Lake Ave., AC4-121
Worcester, MA 01655
Phone 508 856 3800
Fax 774 442 4668

June 14, 2012

Melissa Puliafico, MBA
Director, Educational Affairs
Office of Educational Affairs
UMass Medical School

Dear Ms. Puliafico:

I am writing to provide details of Ms. Colleen Burnham's role in the design and implementation of the Flexible Clinical Experience (FCE program). I believe a better understanding of her role by all concerned is important during the restructuring of responsibilities that is underway at the Office of Educational Affairs.

Colleen and I became associated with the FCE program in November 2011. This was following the completion of the Stage 1 of the planning process. We have seen the program evolve through the second stage of planning, its approval by the clinical years committee, introduction of the program to faculty and securing commitment from faculty for the experiences, setting up the program web page, introduction of the program to the students, assignment of experiences to students, and eventually ensuring a smooth start to the program this week. In short, we have worked together to see the program from conception to its final form. Colleen has been actively involved and provided input at each stage. The progress made thus far would not have been possible without her contribution.

Colleen's expertise in educational methodologies and her organizational skills have contributed to each stage of the program development. Her background in management and online learning is clearly reflected in her work for the FCE. During the planning stages she identified potential issues around the logistics of offering over 500 individual experiences to about 125 students and provided solutions to many of these problems. To administer the program we needed centralized databases, and online communication tools which she developed. For example, she developed online forms for FCE proposals both for faculty and self-designed experiences for students. Data from these forms could be collated on one site and organized. The data could also be transferred between different people, facilitating approval of these experiences. In order to improve navigation through these forms she sought feedback and made changes as needed. During the introductory stages of the program, she provided various graphics outlining the program, and organized an informational session for the students where we explained various aspects of the program. At the next stage, while I concentrated on introducing the program to

faculty and departments, and securing teaching commitments from faculty members, Colleen looked at each proposal to see if the objectives and evaluation methods reflected met the educational criteria for the program. She then posted them on the program website. She also created an online “blackboard” for more detailed educational material for each experience. She helped to create evaluation questions both for faculty and students, based on guidelines, which she is familiar with as an educator. The next task of allocating each of the medical students 4 experiences from a choice of about 800 experiences offered by faculty and designed by students, was handled by her singlehandedly. A lottery had been planned for this task, but there was no system in place! An online tool was developed, which allowed students to prioritize choices, highlight prerequisites and Colleen displayed her organizational skills in manually taking this data and assigning each student the FCE’s for the entire year. She has independently fielded questions about all aspects of the FCE program from faculty and students, and her answers have always been consistent with what my reply would have been. There are few people I know that are “on-call” 24x7 to answer questions, troubleshoot problems, or provide information, and Colleen is one of them. She has been available every single day to respond to any aspect of the FCE program since the program started.

Much work still needs to be done, including collating and analyzing data from FCE experiences, and instituting program improvements. We also need to constantly update our offerings and broaden the scope of the offerings available to the students. We want to be able to provide students more guidance on how they can design their own FCE’s. I believe Colleen’s continued association with this program would be an invaluable asset, and I know she would also be able to provide similar support to other educational programs. I hope you are able to give this matter active consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Samir Malkani, MD
Associate Clinical Professor of Medicine
Division of Diabetes

CC: Michele Pugnaire, MD