

Administrative Fellowship Programs: Role and Code of Good Practice

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Statement of the Issue

Post-graduate Administrative Fellowship Programs in Healthcare Management (hereafter referred to as “Fellowships”) are a critical stepping stone for many early careerists who will ultimately aspire to senior leadership roles. They contrast with other post-graduate positions in at least two important ways:

- (1) Fellowships are time-limited, typically lasting between 12-24 months;
- (2) Fellowships emphasize structured learning and leadership development in addition to completion of work;

There are also some graduate health management programs that require a residency that spans between 9 and 12 months for graduation. Those students also may compete for and participate in the Fellowship Programs described here, however, some fellowship programs require completion of a degree to apply.

The American College of Healthcare Executives’ **Policy on Appropriate Preparation for Healthcare Executive Management Positions for All New Entrants to the Field** (November 2014) notes, “It is preferred that graduate students complete a postgraduate fellowship or residency.” The Policy goes on to say:

Healthcare executives and employers contribute to the success and development of future leaders by providing postgraduate fellowship experiences. Fellowships help transition a young professional from the world of academic learning to real world experiences. Fellows can make a meaningful contribution to the organization when the fellow is assigned real projects that cross organizational lines. Employers are encouraged to offer these opportunities to assist the entry of students to the field of healthcare management. Employers must also be aware of the rigor of accredited programs, such as those accredited by CAHME, and the advantages of hiring accredited programs’ graduates. Healthcare executives share responsibility to elevate both students and stakeholders on the best pathway for success.

Although many fellows report having positive experiences with their fellowship experience, historically, the absence of uniform approaches to these programs has resulted in practices that can undermine fairness, including burdensome application, interview, and acceptance practices, which can limit the ability of students to assess the program’s quality and choose a fellowship program that is a best fit for their career goals.

Graduate programs are supportive of post-graduate fellowships as an effective entrée into the field of practice; however, there are increasing inefficiencies in the system that create substantial work on the part of faculty and administrative members who are tasked to write countless letters of recommendations on a less than optimal timeline in the student’s education.

Similarly, while fellowship program directors are committed to the success of the fellowships pipeline development opportunity the current system creates an equally challenging application and recruitment environment. These hospital/health system programs are faced with increasingly competitive forces to accelerate their recruitment process, in turn limiting their ability to adequately assess and consider the applicant pool and recruit candidates that are a best fit for their particular program.

To address some of the aforementioned challenges the following guidelines were developed by the National Council on Administrative Fellowships (NCAF). NCAF is a voluntary membership organization of leading graduate health management programs and administrative fellowship programs who work collaboratively to advance the role, availability, and quality of fellowships and the fellowships process.

Policy Position

NCAF believes that (1) the development of early careerist healthcare leaders and managers can be greatly enhanced by the completion of a high-quality post-graduate fellowship, (2) organizations sponsoring fellowships derive a large benefit from the contributions of high-potential, early careerists to operating and transforming healthcare systems, and (3) graduate programs, employers, and students will benefit from better coordination across the field in the development and operation of fellowship programs.

The following guidelines were established to support better coordination for all stakeholders involved:

Graduate program directors and advisors

- Graduate program directors and advisors should take an active role in supporting the fellowship process by:
 - Communicating their support of the NCAF process, deadlines, and Code requirements to students
 - Preparing students with the requisite skills for success in fellowship programs
 - Developing an understanding of the role of fellowships to future career development
 - Promoting the value of fellowship programs to graduate students
 - Promoting the value of fellowship programs to alumni who may be in a position to develop fellowship sites
 - Connecting with healthcare organizations that currently offer administrative fellowship programs so that students gain increased exposure to potential fellowship opportunities
 - Seeking feedback from recent program graduates about their experiences with specific fellowship sites
 - Assisting current students in considering whether, how, and which specific fellowship placements may benefit their career goals, align with their interests, and meet their geographic preferences
 - Supporting students in putting together competitive applications for appropriate fellowship programs
 - Providing references and transcripts of academic credentials that quickly and clearly distinguish and differentiate the top and best students

Students

- Students should take an active role in considering whether a fellowship placement may benefit them by:
 - Discussing fellowship opportunities with their program advisors
 - Investing a sufficient amount of time researching fellowship sites before applying, to ensure they are a good fit for their background as well as career interests
 - Investing an adequate amount of time preparing fellowship application materials (personal essay, resume, etc.)
- Students who apply for fellowships should exemplify a professional approach to the application process by:

- Only applying to and interviewing at fellowship programs where they are genuinely interested in accepting an offer
- Properly preparing for each specific interview
- After the interview process, prioritizing fellowship site preferences to expedite the offer process
- Holding only one offer at any point during the offer process, whether the offer is made by direct communication, email, voicemail, or text
- Providing a response to an offer within the time frames specified by the organization, which cannot be less than 48 hours
- Understand that hospitals generally have defined budgets for fellow salaries and benefits
- Thoughtfully considering options and accepting a fellowship offer only with the full intention to serve as a Fellow at that organization
- Upon acceptance of a fellowship offer, notifying any other organizations that have extended offers or interviews that a position has been accepted elsewhere and withdrawing their applications

Fellowship Program Administrators

- Fellowship program administrators should adopt good recruiting practices by:
 - Providing applicants with an accurate description of their fellowship program, including both its strengths and limitations
 - Working collaboratively with other fellowship program administrators to provide a coordinated approach to the fellowship recruiting process. This includes:
 - Adhering to the uniform application deadline, which is designed to allow fellowship applicants an adequate opportunity to clarify their post-graduate career interests. The uniform application deadline is the first Monday of October. **For Fall of 2016, the uniform application deadline will be no sooner than Monday, October 3.**
 - Adhering to the uniform offer date by refraining from making any formal or informal offers, which will allow students and fellowship programs adequate time for the interview process. There is a 6-week period between the application deadline and the offer date. **For Fall of 2016, the uniform, initial offer period begins no sooner than Monday, November 14.**
 - Complying with the uniform offer acceptance time period of no less than 48 hours from **time of the offer.**
 - Providing constructive feedback to graduate program directors regarding the quality of their applicants, when appropriate or requested
- During the fellowship engagement, fellowship program administrators should adopt good development practices by:
 - Providing a high-quality program and experience for the fellows they recruit and work with
 - Providing performance feedback to fellows on a regular basis
 - Taking the initiative to discuss post-fellowship employment opportunities no less than three months prior to the scheduled conclusion of the fellowship
- As a follow up to the fellowship experience, fellowship program administrators should conduct post-fellowship evaluations that provide the organization with accurate and timely feedback of their program's strengths and weaknesses for continuous improvement purposes.

- Fellowship program administrators should strive to build the reputation and value of all administrative fellowships for the healthcare management profession by:
 - Supporting and adhering to efforts to standardize application and acceptance processes and deadlines
 - Supporting applicants' ability to determine which site is the best fit for their interests and needs
 - Striving to create learning and development opportunities that exceed the expectations of the field of practice for young careerists

The combination of these activities will help ensure that students can attain and are adequately prepared for positions that lead to future leadership roles in the field.