

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT ACCREDITATION, CAAHEP, AND COPACET

What Is Accreditation?

Accreditation is a status granted to an educational institution or program that has been determined to meet or exceed established standards for educational quality. Accreditation has dual purposes: to assure quality and promote improvement. Accreditation applies to institutions or programs, in contrast to certification, credentialing, and licensure, all of which apply to individuals.

What Organizations Accredit Educational Programs?

In the United States there are approximately 90 accrediting bodies that accredit professional training programs, as listed [here](#). These bodies include, for example, the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN), the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE), and the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Accreditation Commission (ACPE). Most of these accrediting bodies have a very specific and narrow mission and scope – for example, they accredit only audiology programs or chiropractic programs.

What is CAAHEP?

CAAHEP stands for the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs. CAAHEP is the largest accrediting association for health care training programs in the U.S. There are currently approximately 2,500 CAAHEP-accredited health care training programs at 1,300 sponsoring institutions. These programs span 32 health sciences occupations. CAAHEP's predecessor organization was CAHEA – the American Medical Association's Committee on Allied Health Education Accreditation. CAHEA evolved into CAAHEP in 1994. Thus, CAAHEP has been accrediting health care training programs for almost 30 years. CAAHEP has a wealth of structures, templates, resources, supports, and experience to help simplify and streamline the process the developing and implementing an accreditation process. Detailed information on CAAHEP can be found at www.caahep.org.

What Are Clinical Ethicists?

Clinical ethicists are specially trained healthcare professionals who work in health care organizations to identify, analyze, prevent, and resolve ethical challenges. Now commonplace in U.S. hospitals and healthcare systems, clinical ethicists interact directly with patients, families, and healthcare providers to help them address ethics issues in patient care. Unlike other health care professionals (physicians, nurses, social workers, chaplains, etc.), there are no codified standards for clinical ethicist training, nor are there safeguards in place to ensure that training programs adequately prepare trainees to serve as clinical ethicists.

What Are Clinical Ethics Fellowship Programs?

Clinical ethics fellowship programs are professional development programs that prepare trainees for a career as a professional clinical ethicist. While these programs are widely considered the gold standard for clinical ethicist training, widespread concerns have been raised about the variability of clinical ethics fellowships. Until recently, such concerns were based on anecdotal evidence alone. To address the lack of empirical data about clinical ethics fellowships, Fox and Wasserman surveyed 100% of clinical ethics fellowship program directors in the U.S. and Canada.¹ They found that clinical ethics fellowships vary widely on important characteristics related to the competency of program graduates such as goals, pre-admission requirements, months required to complete the program, training hours per week, and number of ethics consultations that trainees perform. Notably, programs did not consistently meet certain basic standards expected of training programs, as articulated by professional societies.

Why Develop An Accreditation Process?

Developing an accreditation process is the best way to address concerns about the quality and consistency of clinical ethics fellowship programs. Accreditation is a critical step for any emerging profession, as it helps assure students, health care systems, and the general public that educational standards are being clearly defined and met. Accreditation also helps to ensure that all graduates, regardless of where they were trained, meet the same high standards and are competent to practice, thereby engendering public trust in professionals and in the healthcare system. An added benefit of accreditation would be eligibility to apply for CMS funding.

How Does Accreditation Relate to CMS Funding?

To help ensure that an adequate workforce of health care professionals is available to the public, the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) incentivizes hospitals to operate clinical training programs by reimbursing them for “passed through” program costs. CMS funds clinical training for a wide variety of professionals ranging from physicians and nurses to occupational therapists, X-ray technologists, dietitians, pharmacists, and hospital chaplains. To qualify for CMS funding, clinical ethics fellowship programs would need to be accredited by a nationally recognized organization such as CAAHEP. Once accredited, clinical ethics fellowships would be eligible to apply for CMS funding in subsequent years as long as they meet specific criteria outlined in Federal regulations ([42 CFR § 413.85](#))

¹ Ellen Fox & Jason Adam Wasserman. Clinical Ethics Fellowship Programs in the U.S. and Canada: A Descriptive Study of Program Characteristics and Practices. *American Journal of Bioethics* 2024. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2024.2388723>

Do Clinical Ethics Fellowship Program Directors Support Accreditation?

Support for the development of an accreditation process is very strong. Fox and Wasserman² showed that if accreditation were to become available in the next 5 years, almost 80% of clinical ethics fellowship program directors in the U.S. would be likely to apply. In addition, most program directors thought that lack of a national accreditation process (75%), agreed upon standards (90%), and funding for CEFPs (94%) were moderate to major problems for the field of bioethics.

What is COPACET?

COPACET is the Council On Program Accreditation for Clinical Ethicist Training – a new Committee on Accreditation that is being formed under CAAHEP. Committees on Accreditation act under the auspices of CAAHEP to develop and review Standards and Guidelines for the discipline, assess individual educational programs, and make recommendations to CAAHEP for accreditation of those programs that meet the Standards and Guidelines. The mission of COPACET is to promote the highest levels of professional competence of clinical ethicists through:

- development and promotion of professional training standards;
- encouragement of excellence in training program development; and
- review and evaluation of clinical ethicist training programs.

Who Are COPACET's Sponsoring Organizations?

CoA's must have one or more sponsoring organizations. Sponsoring organizations must be national in scope and have legitimate concerns about, and responsibilities for, the quality of personnel prepared in the discipline's educational programs. COPACET has two sponsoring organizations: the Association of Bioethics Program Directors (ABPD) and the Catholic Health Association (CHA).

What Are CAAHEP Accreditation Standards Like?

CAAHEP standards must conform to CAAHEP's Standards Template, available [here](#). The Standards include requirements for fair business practices, ethical standards, due process, and fair educational practices. All CAAHEP accreditation standards include outcome measures and a requirement for programs to disclose their outcome measures. The Standards also define specific learning objectives that are needed to enter the profession, which programs must demonstrate that their curriculum achieves. CAAHEP accreditation emphasizes outcomes over the specific approach. In other words, programs have the discretion to determine *how* they meet CAAHEP Standards.

² Ellen Fox & Jason Adam Wasserman. Clinical Ethics Fellowship Programs in the U.S. and Canada: Program Directors' Opinions about Accreditation and Funding. *AJOB Empirical Bioethics* 2024. In press.

What is the COPACET Steering Committee?

The COPACET Steering Committee is a group that was established to determine the membership and governance procedures for COPACET and complete this [Application for Committee on Accreditation Membership](#). Steering Committee members were decided by members of the Clinical Ethics Fellowship Accreditation Workgroup in collaboration with COPACET's sponsoring organizations. Additional information about the history of this Workgroup and its role in the formation of the Steering can be found [here](#).

How Did the COPACET Steering Committee Select the Members of the COPACET Board of Directors?

In April of 2024, the COPACET Steering Committee broadly distributed a call for self-nominations to the bioethics community. Nominees were asked to provide detailed information about their background, qualifications, and interests through an on-line form. The selection process was highly competitive, with 38 outstanding candidates, including 22 current or former clinical ethics fellowship program directors, submitting applications by the deadline. Members of the Steering Committee reviewed the applications in detail, collecting more information as needed by researching and/or interviewing the candidate. The Steering Committee was guided by the following criteria, which were determined in advance:

Composition of the COPACET Board of Directors:

The Board of Directors of COPACET shall consist of 8-12 members in addition to the Chair and shall include:

- No more than two (2) individuals appointed by each sponsor organization;
- At least two (2) directors or associate/assistant directors (or equivalent) of accredited clinical ethics fellowship programs (or, if not available, from non-accredited programs that have applied for accreditation or intend to apply in the near future);
- At least two (2) additional clinical ethics educators who are current or former clinical instructors in a clinical ethics fellowship program;
- At least one (1) recent fellow or graduate of a clinical ethics fellowship program (within the last three (3) years);
- At least one (1) experienced hiring manager who has hired at least 5 clinical ethicists; and
- At least two (2) practicing clinical ethicists (paid at least 50% time for clinical ethics)

In selecting Board members, efforts will be made to assure that membership reasonably reflects diverse communities of interest in clinical ethics training (e.g., various disciplines, organizational types, and geographic settings) and that membership includes persons from different cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds and genders.

Who Was Elected to Serve on the COPACET Board of Directors?

The following individuals will begin their terms on the COPACET Board of Directors in January 2025:

Name	Title(s)	Institution(s)
Ellen Fox (Chair), MD, HEC-C	President	Fox Ethics Consulting
Peter Angelos, MD, PhD, HEC-C	Director, MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics; Linda Kohler Anderson Professor of Surgery and Surgical Ethics; Chief of Endocrine Surgery	University of Chicago
Trevor M Bibler, PhD, MTS, HEC-C	Associate Professor of Medicine; Bioethics Program Director	Baylor College of Medicine; Houston Methodist Hospital
Paula Goodman-Crews, MSW, LCSW, HEC-C	Bioethics Director, San Diego Service Area	Kaiser Permanente
Ann M Heesters, PhD	Senior Director of Clinical and Organizational Ethics	University Health Network
Cristie Cole Horsburgh, JD	Staff Ethicist; Co-Director, Cleveland Fellowship in Advanced Bioethics	Cleveland Clinic
Brian Kane, PhD*	Senior Director, Ethics	Catholic Health Association
Hilary Mabel, JD, HEC-C	Bioethicist/Healthcare Ethicist and Core Faculty, Emory Center for Ethics; Assistant Professor of Medicine	Emory University
Renee Mcleod-Sordjan, DNP, PhD, RN, HEC-C*	Dean and Professor; Associate Professor of Medicine; Director of Medical Ethics	Hofstra-Northwell School of Nursing & PA Studies; Donald & Barbara Zucker School of Medicine; Northwell Health
Ruchika Mishra, PhD	Director, Bioethics	Sutter Health
LaShaunda Reese, PhD, MA, MTS, HEC-C**	Senior Clinical Ethicist	Advocate Health
Margie Hodges Shaw, JD, PhD, MA, HEC-C*	Associate Professor, Law and Bioethics; Director, Clinical Ethics Program	University of Rochester
Kelly Stuart, MD, MPH, MTS, MSNDR, HEC-C*	Vice President, Ethics	Bon Secours Mercy Health System

* Appointed by sponsoring organization – one-year term

**Appointed as recent graduate member – one-year term

How Does COPACET Relate to the Healthcare Ethics Consultant-Certified Program?

COPACET's accreditation work will be distinct from and complementary to the work of the Healthcare Ethics Consultant-Certified Program. The HEC-C program certifies individuals, in contrast to accreditation, which applies to training programs. In addition, HEC-C focuses specifically on healthcare ethics consultation – an activity that is often performed by clinical ethicists as part of their jobs but is also often performed by other healthcare professionals serving in a volunteer capacity as members of ethics committees or teams. COPACET will focus on programs that specifically prepare trainees for jobs as a professional clinical ethicist.

What is Happening Between Now and January of 2025, When COPACET Begins Its Work?

Members of the COPACET Steering Committee and future Board of Directors are working to gain formal CAAHEP approval for COPACET, apply for grant funding and solicit donations to support COPACET's work, draft COPACET's bylaws, and establish COPACET as a 501(c)(3) organization. We welcome comments from everyone concerned with clinical ethicist training including clinical ethics practitioners, educators, students, health care providers, institutional administrators, and the public. Your input will be invaluable as we shape the future direction of COPACET.