**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](https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/6dce0c97-7268-4346-91e9-256548bec413/downloads/Programmatic%20Accrediting%20Bodies%20in%20the%20United%20.pdf?ver=1712933837552). These bodies include, for example, the [Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accreditation_Commission_for_Education_in_Nursing) (ACEN), the [Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accreditation_Council_for_Pharmacy_Education) (ACPE), and the [Association for Clinical Pastoral Education](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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](http://www.caahep.org).

**Why Develop An Accreditation Process?**

Clinical ethics fellowship programs have been proliferating rapidly in recent years but vary widely in their goals and methods. Some have raised concerns about the quality of these programs or questioned whether they adequately prepare trainees for their first jobs. A number of clinical ethicists have argued that the appropriate next step in professionalizing our field is to develop an accreditation process for clinical ethics fellowships. Accreditation of training programs is often seen as an essential step for an emerging new profession, as it helps assure students, employers, and the general public that educational standards are being clearly defined and met. A recent survey study of clinical ethics fellowship program directors demonstrates strong support for this approach (Fox and Wasserman, submitted for publication). 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, dieticians, 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, a fellowship would be eligible to apply for CMS funding in subsequent years as long as it meets specific criteria outlined in Federal regulations ([42 CFR § 413.85](https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/42/413.85))

**What is COPACET?**

COPACET is the Council On Program Accreditation for Clinical Ethicist Training – a new Committee on Accreditation (CoA) that is being formed under CAAHEP. CoA’s 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](https://assets.website-files.com/5f466098a462432df91fef63/65133caddca3ef0097d5dab4_2023-03-17_BOARD%20APPROVED%20STANDARDS%20TEMPLATE%20ATTACHMENT%201_Corrected%20template%20date.pdf). 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.

**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](https://www.cognitoforms.com/CAAHEP2/ApplicationForCommitteeOnAccreditationMembership). Steering Committee members were decided by members of the Clinical Ethics Fellowship Accreditation Workgroup in collaboration with COPACET’s sponsoring organizations. Additional information about this Workgroup and its role in the formation of the Steering can be found [here](https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/6dce0c97-7268-4346-91e9-256548bec413/downloads/Clinical%20Ethics%20Fellowship%20Accreditation%20Workg.pdf?ver=1712933837552).

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

In April of 2024 the COPACET Steering Committee broadly distributed a call for self-nominations to the bioethics community. Candidates provided 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?**

These individuals will begin their terms on the COPACET Board of Directors in January, 2025:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 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

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

Members of the COPACET Steering Committee 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.