**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).

**Who Are the Members of the COPACET Steering Committee?**

The members of the Steering Committee are:

Ellen Fox – Chair (Fox Ethics Consulting, LLC)

Renee McLeod-Sordjan – Vice Chair (Hofstra Northwell School of Nursing & PA Studies; Northwell Health)

Mark Repenshek – Vice Chair (Ascension)

Cristie Cole Horsburgh (Cleveland Clinic)

Brian Kane (Catholic Health Association)

Ruchika Mishra (Sutter Health)

Margie Hodges Shaw (Univ. of Rochester School of Medicine; Strong Memorial Hospital)

Kathy Kinlaw – Alternate to Margie Hodges Shaw (Emory University)