

## Association of Pathology Chairs Statement Endorsing the Uniform Timeline for Fellowship Recruitment

Lydia Pleotis Howell MD  
President, Association of Pathology Chairs  
Professor and Chair, Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine  
University of California, Davis School of Medicine

The Association of Pathology Chairs (APC) strongly endorses the national movement to a uniform timeline for fellowship recruitment as described in the recent article by Herrmann *et al* in *Academic Pathology*<sup>1</sup>. Education and training of the next generation of pathologists is the central mission of all academic pathology departments. Other non-academic organizations conduct research, such as research institutes and industry, and there are many non-academic clinical laboratories that provide testing for patient care – but only academic departments of pathology have the responsibility as well as the public’s trust to educate the pathologists who are the future of healthcare. The APC takes this educational responsibility very seriously since it includes important expectations for the fair and ethical treatment of our housestaff who are both our students and our colleagues. In their Statement on Professional Ethics first issued in 1966, the American Association of University Professors clearly describes this responsibility: *“Professors demonstrate respect for students as individuals and adhere to their proper roles as intellectual guides and counselors. Professors make every reasonable effort to foster honest academic conduct .... They avoid any exploitation, harassment, or discriminatory treatment of students. ... As colleagues, professors have obligations that derive from common membership in the community of scholars. Professors do not discriminate against or harass colleagues.”*<sup>2</sup>

APC reminds the membership of their role as intellectual guides and counselors, and their responsibility for honest and non-discriminatory academic conduct. Supporting this new recruitment process reflects these roles and responsibilities and strengthens the community of scholars to which we all belong. The work by Herrmann *et al* clearly demonstrates that the non-uniform, indiscriminate process for fellowship recruitment is not a benefit to our housestaff<sup>1</sup>. The authors provide evidence that residents are required to make important career decisions at an inappropriately early stage of their training. The recruiting departments are also disadvantaged, frequently due to pressure from competition<sup>1,3</sup>. Our residents are a vulnerable group and the non-uniform recruitment process could easily be seen as disrespectful and even exploitative, and does not reflect the published values of the AAUP since an early offer and acceptance is chiefly to the benefit of the recruiting department.

As Herrmann *et al* conclude, the time has come for change<sup>1</sup>. The APC Council endorses the plans of the APC GME Committee to establish:

- (1) a free, public registry of open fellowship positions (within 24 months of matriculation), with program contact information, to be promoted by APC and maintained by APC or ICPI;
- (2) a list on the APC website of all fellowship programs and their parent departments that have pledged to adhere to the timeline and guidelines;
- (3) a confidential review process for reporting violations by fellowship programs that pledged to adhere to the timeline and guidelines; verified violations will be reported to the Chair of the Department housing the fellowship, and

(4) responses and possible penalties, commensurate with levels of infraction, for fellowship programs found to be in violation that pledged to adhere to the timeline and guidelines.

These guidelines will take effect in a phased manner beginning in July 2023. Note that the APC reserves the right to provide consequences to a department who reneges on its stated commitment. However, we recognize that such circumstances must be explored carefully and confidentially on a case-by-case basis consistent with the principles and requirements associated with academic freedom.

The APC looks forward to working with its members to ensure a more supportive academic environment for our housestaff and a more respectful and transparent future for the community of academic pathology via this uniform recruitment timeline. This is a future that we all deserve, most especially our trainees and the patients that they will serve.

#### References:

1. Herrmann AC, Hanau C, Karcher D, Miller DC, Murtha A, Sanders AE, Timmons C, Kaul KL. The pathology fellowship application crisis: the current state and suggestions for remediation. *Acad Pathol* 2022;9. [doi:10.1016/j.acpath.2022.100029](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acpath.2022.100029)
2. American Association of University Professors. Statement on Professional Ethics. Revised 1970. Accessed May 28, 2022. <https://www.aaup.org/report/statement-professional-ethics>
3. Miller DC, Karcher DS, Kaul K. The crisis in the pathology subspecialty fellowship application process: historical perspective and setting the stage. *Acad Pathol* 2022;9. [doi:10.1016/j.acpath.2022.100030](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acpath.2022.100030)