

**Clinical Learning  
Environment Review Program**

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**Pursuing  
Excellence**  
in **Clinical Learning  
Environments**



ACGME

Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education

Over the past decade, health care organizations have increasingly focused on developing and implementing systems-based approaches to improving patient care. The ACGME, through its *Pursuing Excellence in Clinical Learning Environments* initiative, will bring together leaders of our nation's teaching hospitals and medical centers to optimize the role of graduate medical education (GME) as a key component of these systems.

## Focus on Outcomes

The ACGME hears the public's demand for our nation as a whole to improve the way health care is provided; to focus on issues affecting patient safety; and to identify strategies that lead to measurable improvement in health care services and health status of individuals. In an effort to accelerate positive change, the ACGME reevaluated its approach to assessing GME programs and Sponsoring Institutions, and, in doing so, has re-structured its activities to emphasize the outcomes of resident and fellow physician education. It put in place the Milestones to advance assessment of resident competency and, in 2012, created the Clinical Learning Environment Review (CLER) Program.

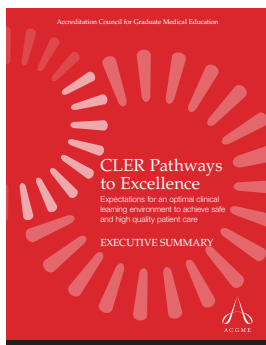
## CLER Program

The CLER Program is built on a model of formative assessment and feedback. Teams of CLER site visitors periodically visit hospitals, medical centers, and other clinical sites to study resident and fellow physician engagement in six areas of focus (patient safety, health care quality and health care disparities, care transitions, supervision, duty hours/fatigue management and mitigation, and professionalism), and present the leaders of these organizations with a report of findings. The CLER Program's underlying premise is that when the leaders of clinical learning environments are presented with the synthesis of information gathered during the visit, they will use it to build upon their strengths and act on opportunities for improvement. The CLER Program is linked to accreditation through a single requirement—that each ACGME-accredited Sponsoring Institution must complete a periodic site visit.

The ultimate goal is to improve patient care delivered by resident and fellow physicians today, and into the future, as they become independent practitioners, and to do so in a humanistic environment that promotes professionalism.

The CLER Program uses a framework of structure, process, and outcomes to characterize clinical learning environments. It seeks to determine:

- What is the clinical learning environment's infrastructure for addressing the six focus areas?
- How integrated is the GME leadership and faculty within this infrastructure?
- How engaged are the resident and fellow physicians in working with the clinical learning environment's infrastructure to address the six focus areas?
- How does the clinical learning environment determine the success of its efforts to integrate GME into its infrastructure?
- What areas has the clinical learning environment identified as opportunities for improvement?



## Pathways to Excellence

Developed by the CLER Evaluation Committee comprised of experts representing leadership, education, and patient advocacy in addition to the six focus areas, the *CLER Pathways to Excellence* instrument provides guidance to clinical learning environments on the focus areas of the CLER Program.

In keeping with the model of continuous quality improvement, the *CLER Pathways to Excellence* will evolve over time. Future versions will incorporate what is learned from the ongoing stream of data generated by the CLER visits and continued input from the community.

## Early Lessons Learned

The CLER team visited 297 hospitals, medical centers, and ambulatory sites in the first cycle. As part of the process, each site received an individualized report of findings to assist in beginning a journey of improvement within each organization.

Across the six focus areas, the first cycle of CLER visits revealed opportunities for the GME community to work more closely with clinical sites to enhance learning while also improving patient care. The ACGME will publish a technical report from this first cycle.

While the CLER visits identified many opportunities specific to the six CLER focus areas that will be included in the technical report, there are several overarching themes that emerged related to the general framework of structure, process, and outcomes.

### Overarching Themes

- Clinical learning environments vary in their approaches to and capacity for addressing patient safety and health care quality, as well as the degree to which they engage resident and fellow physicians in addressing these areas.
- Clinical learning environments vary in their approach to implementing GME. In many clinical learning environments, the approach to GME is largely developed and implemented independent of the organization's other areas of strategic planning and focus.
- Clinical learning environments vary in the degree to which they coordinate and implement educational resources across the health care professions.
- Clinical learning environments vary in the extent to which they invest in continually educating, training, and integrating faculty members and program directors in the areas of health care quality, patient safety, and other systems-based initiatives.

Of note from the first cycle of visits is that across most hospitals, medical centers, and ambulatory sites, resident physicians serve an important role in providing care for vulnerable populations. Clinical learning environments have an opportunity to learn from these front-line care providers to better serve their known vulnerable patient populations. In future cycles, the CLER Program will more deeply examine this and other types of resident and fellow engagement in the clinical learning environment.

Common to all of the overarching themes is a high degree of variability both between and within sites. As the first set of findings establishes a baseline, it is unclear what this variation means—both for patient care and for residents and fellows. It will be necessary for the CLER Program to identify the circumstances where this variation is beneficial, and where it may contribute to suboptimal learning or vulnerabilities in patient care.

# Pursuing Excellence

## in Clinical Learning Environments

The ACGME recognizes that the best solutions often come from shared learning. With the support of partnering organizations in health care quality and education, the ACGME is launching a new initiative to facilitate improvements in our nation's clinical learning environments. Over the next four years, *Pursuing Excellence in Clinical Learning Environments* will bring together leaders from hospitals, medical centers, graduate medical education programs, and other stakeholders to generate ideas, test innovative approaches to improving patient care in the context of ACGME-accredited residency and fellowship programs, and share successes.

The initiative includes three major components: Pathway Innovators, Pathway Leaders, and Pathway Learners. In this model, a core group of innovators will share its efforts with an ever-widening network of leaders and learners. The format is designed to bring about high-leverage changes that broadly affect the quality of clinical learning environments.

As the early participants (Innovators) begin to identify solutions, they will share their knowledge with increasingly larger audiences. In this manner, organizations that may lack the structure or resources to be on the leading edge of change can benefit by learning from the challenges and successes of others.

In seeking organizations to participate in the *Pursuing Excellence* initiative, the ACGME will focus on identifying those that are willing to explore new systems-based approaches to improving the clinical learning environment. It will aim to assemble a cross-section of organizations that vary in size, geographic location, and type of mission.

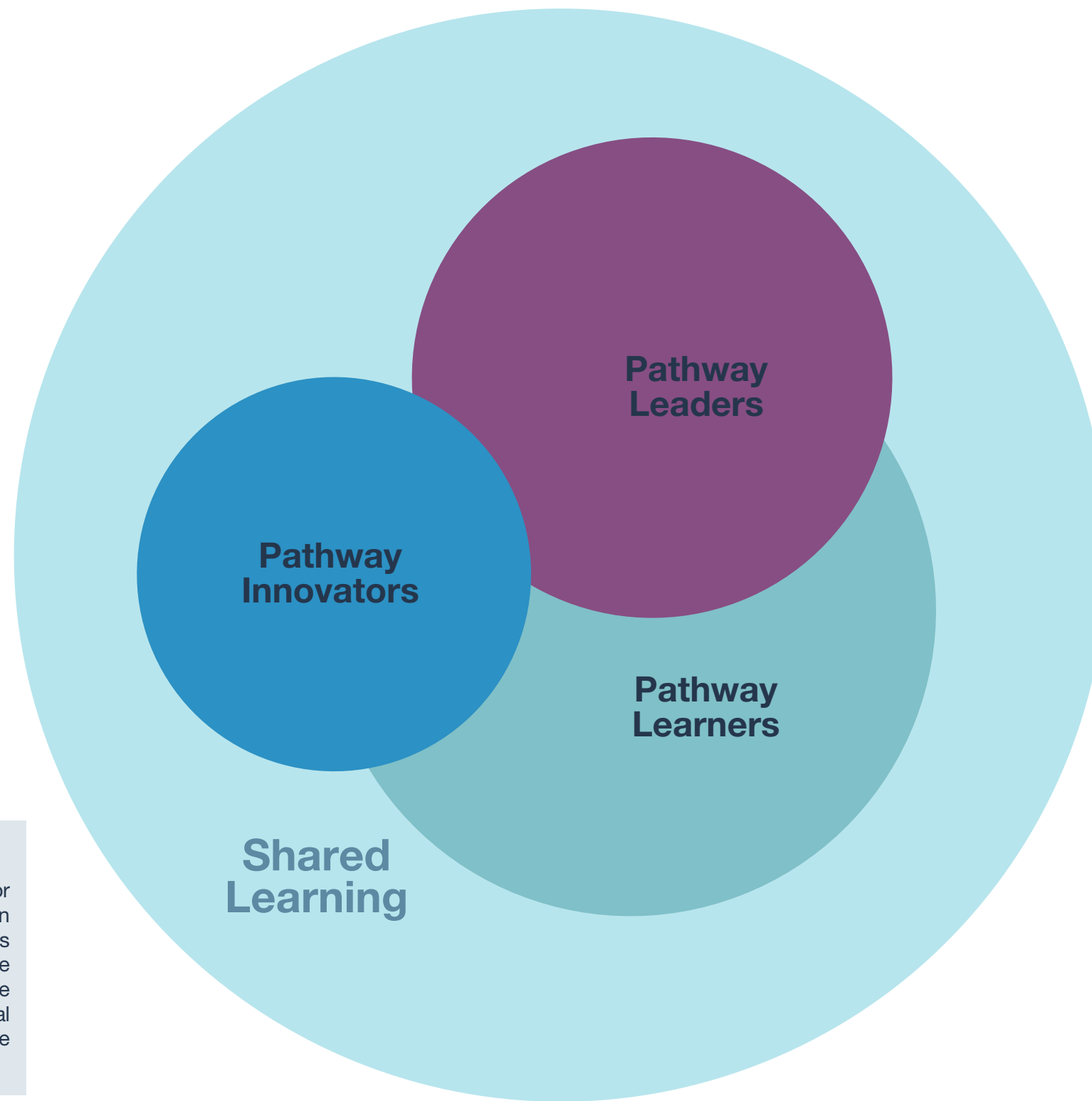
### Pathway Innovators

The Pathway Innovators component is comprised of highly-motivated teams of hospital and medical center executives and GME leaders from Sponsoring Institutions that will commit significant time and resources to enhancing the vision and culture of clinical learning within their organizations. To spur Innovator engagement, the ACGME will provide external funding through a competitive award process, as well as access to a range of consultants and experts to assist with implementing new models for clinical learning environments.

Organizations selected as Pathway Innovators will meet several times per year over a four-year period to share progress and learn from one another.

### Shared Learning

To optimize learning, the ACGME will facilitate opportunities for the participants in each of the components to share information with one another throughout the initiative. As the participants identify successful practices, they will become teachers and role models for their colleagues, sharing lessons learned across a wide range of venues, including the ACGME's Annual Educational Conference, meetings of key stakeholders, webinars, and online tools and resources.



### Pathway Leaders

This component is designed to help support Sponsoring Institutions that seek to improve the quality of their clinical learning environments by focusing selectively on one of the six CLER focus areas of patient safety, health care quality, care transitions, supervision, duty hours/fatigue management and mitigation, and professionalism.

Although narrower in scope and shorter in duration than the Pathway Innovators component, this component will bring together groups of key individuals from the participating sites of ACGME-accredited Sponsoring Institutions to identifying new structures and processes for optimizing the learning environment in the chosen focus area.

### Pathway Learners

This component aims to reach a broad audience of Sponsoring Institutions seeking to improve their clinical learning environments. Over the four years of the *Pursuing Excellence* initiative, the ACGME will identify numerous opportunities for the Pathway Innovators and Pathway Leaders to share their successes with the Pathway Learners. The Pathway Learners will help to accelerate adoption of the efforts developed by the Pathway Innovators and Leaders by providing important feedback on how to shape the innovation and learning so that it can be integrated across a large and variable set of clinical learning environments.

# Capacity Building for Clinical Learning Environments

# Key Dates

## 2015

November 3 \_\_\_\_\_ Release of Request for Information

December 15 \_\_\_\_\_ Request for Information Comment Deadline

## 2016

February 28 \_\_\_\_\_ Release of Request for Proposals

May 4 \_\_\_\_\_ Request for Proposal Deadline

July \_\_\_\_\_ Innovator Awards Announced

September - October \_\_\_\_\_ Launch of Innovators Collaborative

November - December \_\_\_\_\_ Call for Leaders Collaborative

## 2017

February \_\_\_\_\_ Launch of Leaders Collaborative

September - October \_\_\_\_\_ Pursuing Excellence Forum

## 2018

February \_\_\_\_\_ Launch of Learners Collaborative

September - October \_\_\_\_\_ Pursuing Excellence Forum

## 2019

February \_\_\_\_\_ Pursuing Excellence Shared Learning Event at  
ACGME Annual Education Conference

September - October \_\_\_\_\_ Pursuing Excellence Forum

**For more information please visit [acgme.org](http://acgme.org)  
or e-mail [PEI@acgme.org](mailto:PEI@acgme.org)**



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