Box 2 Folder 6

STATEMENT

OF THE

ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN MEDICAL COLLEGES

on

Recruitment and Retention of Physicians in the Veterans Health Services and Research Administration

Presented to the

U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Hospitals and Health Care

Presented by

John J. Hutton, Jr., M.D. Dean University of Cincinnati College of Medicine Cincinnati, Ohio

> Wednesday, October 25, 1989 334 Cannon House Office Building



Association of American Medical Colleges / One Dupont Circle, N.W. / Washington, D.C. 20036 / (202) 828-0525

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is John Hutton, M.D. I serve as Dean of the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine. Today I am appearing on behalf of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). The AAMC serves as the national voice for the nation's 127 accredited medical schools, over 85 professional academic societies, and 435 major teaching hospitals. Seventy-seven of those 435 teaching hospitals are VA facilities; in addition, over 100 of the medical schools, including the University of Cincinnati, share an affiliation with one or more VA medical centers. Similarly, 134 of the VA's 172 hospitals are affiliated with a medical school. The AAMC understands and strongly supports the VA's medical care and research programs. On behalf of the AAMC, I am pleased to have the opportunity this morning to present my views about the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) ability to recruit and retain physicians.

As Dean, I cooperate in staffing our VA affiliate, the Cincinnati VAMC with physicians who can both care for patients and teach medicine. In recent years, this portion of my professional activities has become more challenging. It has become increasingly difficult to recruit new physicians as well as satisfy the needs and interests of current physicians. When we recruit for and with the VA, we demand quality. The veteran deserves care by high quality doctors and we insist that the best doctors teach our medical students and house staff. Over time the VA has lost increasing numbers of physicians to attrition and has not been able to attract the same number of physicians of similar caliber to meet the congressionally-mandated FTEE level. Fiscal constraints and deteriorating physical conditions have made the VA a less inviting environment in which to practice. The shortage of physicians when coupled with the shortage of money for supplies and equipment has lead medical schools to question whether the VA medical centers can remain satisfactory places to train doctors.

In recent months, we have seen highly qualified physicians leave the Cincinnati VAMC for positions in the private sector because the VA financial disincentives were too great for them to continue their association with the VA. Those top quality physicians leaving have included a radiologist, a pathologist, and an orthopaedic surgeon. We have been unsuccessful in recruiting replacements for these individuals.

Similar scenarios can be found nationwide. For example, a West Coast VAMC has had a vacancy for a gastroenterologist (a specialist in stomach and intestinal diseases) for over one year and a vacancy for a cardiologist for six to eight months. Despite repeated advertisements and attempts by the university's Department of Medicine chairman to recruit nationally, the hospital does not expect to recruit a cardiologist before July, 1990.

Procedural-oriented specialists are the most difficult to recruit because they are paid less in the VA than in other types of practice. These absences have serious secondary effects. For example, without an anesthesiologist, it is difficult to recruit or retain the surgeons whose work requires such services; other physicians of internal medicine suffer without the support of a gastroenterologist. The end result, of course, is that the care of patients is compromised.

The reason for physician shortages in the VA is simple, VA compensation simply is not competitive. Physician pay in the VA has been at fixed levels for an inordinate period of time, frustrating the VA's attempts to attract physicians in critical specialty areas such as cardiology, gastroenterology, radiology. thoracic surgery, orthopedics, urology, pathology, anesthesiology, vascular surgery, ENT, and ophthalmology.

To use the same West Coast VAMC previously mentioned as an example, a senior cardiologist based at the affiliated university earns 50 percent more than the comparable VA cardiologist. The differential is so extreme that individuals at the associate professor or professor level can no longer be recruited. I have with me today, and will submit for the record, a copy of the AAMC faculty salary survey. Because both the AAMC and the VA salary data are complicated, I will not take the time now for a detailed comparison. I will be happy to explain the differences during the question and answer period, if you are interested.

Beyond the assistant professor level, the VA fails to offer an attractive compensation package. To their credit VA hospitals have generally been unwilling to sacrifice quality of physicians for affordability, nor should we suggest that they do so. The only solution is for the VA to find a way to meet the salary difference. In the broadest terms, for medical specialties there is a difference of \$20,000 to \$40,000 in annual salary between VA-based and university-based physicians, depending on the location and the individual's level of seniority and practice specialty. With slight variation based on geography, the VA remains competitive roughly through the assistant professor level for internists; for surgical specialties, VA salaries are not even in the ballpark with other practioners.

Historically, the VA has played an important role in academic medicine. VA physicians share responsibilities similar to those of their university colleagues. For that reason, schools of medicine have attempted to ensure that VA and non-VA based faculty receive similar compensation packages. For young physicians, the VA offers comparable salaries. However, as physicians progress in their career to the associate professor and professor level, VA salaries fail to be competitive. In the past, universities have devised means of supplementing VA salaries. As VA salaries fall further behind, there has been increasing pressure to continue and expand this practice in order to retain senior VA faculty. Because of the complexity of the arrangements, it is difficult to quantify the extent to which this occurs. However, I feel confident in saying that this is becoming a necessary practice that the medical school finds increasingly expensive and difficult to support.

With the increase of economic pressures on medical schools and the lowering of physician fees generally, we have less flexibility to continue to subsidize VA salaries. In the past, salary supplements to VA physicians were provided by taxing the income of their university colleagues. However, there is now less money for everyone. To offset the salary disparities and because of the inability to fill vacancies with permanent, full-time physicians, the Cincinnati VAMC has been forced to contract for certain services. This approach is tremendously expensive and constraining. Unfortunately, we are seeing a greater need to use contracts for certain services because the VA salaries for physicians in scarce medical specialities are far behind competitive rates.

Contracting for specialty services also limits the VA's financial flexibility because contract services must be paid for from operational dollars - rather than salary dollars. This administrative and accounting burden forces the VA to expend funds on salary that would otherwise purchase items such as general medical supplies, equipment, and prescription drugs.

Salary is not the only factor in compensation where the VA cannot meet the comparable package offered to most non-VA academic physicians. The VA, as part of the Federal government, offers a benefits package that is usually less generous than the university benefits package. This is true for public as well as private universities. I will mention a few specific, simple examples. First, Federal employees are required to pay a portion of their health insurance premium; most universities cover the full cost of the premium for individual coverage. Second, a Federal employee contributes to the Federal elective-based retirement savings plan, or the Thrift Savings Plan, with posttax dollars: most universities and/or faculty practice corporations offer similar elective plans to which employees may contribute pre-tax dollars. Again, these differentials in compensation become more distinct as an individual's career progresses. Third, universities frequently provide tuition remission for the families of their full-time employees, a benefit not available in the VA. In addition, the medical school faculty who are employed by the faculty practice corporation enjoy a greater degree of support for professional enhancements. For instance, they are offered funds to purchase scholarly books and journals, to attend medical meetings, and for computer and technical support.

Young physicians join the VA clinical staff for a variety of reasons, two inter-related factors are of the great importance. As I develop this point, please keep in mind it is the young physician that the VA is financially best able to attract. First, affiliation of the VA with an academic medical center contributes to a stimulating intellectual environment and often offers access to the academic center's excellent physical and human resources. Second, the VA offers opportunities to practice medicine and conduct research in an institutional setting.

I would like to take a moment to highlight the importance of the VA research program. You are undoubtedly well aware of the benefits to veterans as result of opportunities to participate in research endeavors. In addition, research opportunities greatly facilitate the VA's ability to recruit and retain outstanding physicians. This function of the research program was perhaps best explained in testimony delivered to this Subcommittee on October 11 by Joseph Bates, M.D., Chief of Medical Services at the Little Rock VAMC. "VA staff positions [are] attractive [because of] the opportunity to be involved in clinical research and be associated with other like-minded clinicians. Absent the research program, the benefits of VA employment would be less competitive with those found in private practice or in university academic centers. The research program serves as the intellectual carrot that attracts some of our best and brightest physicians to treat veteran patients." I concur completely with Dr. Bates' statement.

The research program is an invaluable tool in recruitment and retention. The opportunity to conduct research serves as an incentive to attract and retain bright physicians who provide top quality patient care. VA investigators are well schooled in the latest advances in medicine and surgery. This knowledge improves the clinical care provided to veterans.

The importance of VA research funding, particularly in this climate of budget constraints, cannot be over-emphasized. The payoffs that result from this relatively small, but highly leveraged amount of money, are tremendous. The VA literally cannot afford to lose this precious resource, for fear of losing other more important resources, meaning high quality and dedicated professional personnel. At the same time, I urge Congress and the VA to study the physician pay issue and work to develop a system that more competitively compensates VA employees.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning. I will be happy to answer questions or expand and clarify my remarks.

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TABLE 9 Compensation of Full-Time Faculty in Private and Public U.S. Medical Schools Faculty with M.D. Degree—All Regions, September 1988 (percentile and mean values in thousands of dollars)

BASIC SCIENCE DEPTS		INSTRUCTOR		ASSI	IST PR	ASSIST PROFESSOR	OR	ASSOC		PROFESSOR	~		PROF	PROFESSOR			CHAI	CHAIRMAN	
ANATOMY	2017 5017 8017 8017	COUNT MEAN	-	20th 50th 80th	27 CO 36 64 ME	COUNT MEAN	39.9	201h 501h 801h	44 CC 55 ME 68 ME	COUNT	20	2014 5014 8014	69 C 76 0 90 M	COUNT MEAN	1 61 1 7 97	2014 5014 8014	89 106 135	COUNT	27 108 0
BIOCHEMISTRY	20th 50th 80th	COUNT MEAN	2	20th 50th 80th	32 CO 95 ME	COUNT	53.0	201h 501h 801h	47 CC 55 63 ME	COUNT	542	201h 501h 801h	70 C 81 C 109 M	COUNT	34	201 h 501 h 801 h	87 109 138	COUNT	113 8
MICROBIOLOGY	20th 50th 80th	COUNT MEAN	e	201 h 501 h 801 h	54 54 63 ME	COUNT	11 57.3	201h 501h 801h	45 CC 58 75 ME	COUNT MEAN	11 59.4	20th 50th 80th	63 C 82 C 102 M	COUNT MEAN	49 84 7	204 h 804 h	101 114 138	COUNT	26 119 0
PHARMACOLOGY	20th 50th 80th	23 COUNT 26 38 MEAN	4 28.3	20th 50th 80th	39 CC 42 CC 66 ME	COUNT	12	20th 50th 80th	50 CC 54 CC 69 ME	COUNT	17 60.8	20th 50th 80th	63 C 81 M 101 M	COUNT MEAN	101 80 7	2011 5011 3011	89 108 127	COUNT MEAN	35 109 2
ADOTOISAHd	201h 501h 801h	COUNT MEAN	8	201 h 501 h 801 h	38 CC 47 50 ME	COUNT	17 47.3	201h 501h 801h	48 CC 57 ME 72 ME	COUNT MEAN	26 59.2	201 h 501 h 801 h	69 69 101 M	COUNT	117 86 6	20th 50th 80th	102 111 129	COUNT	34
OTHER BASIC	20th 50th 80th	30 COUNT 33 48 MEAN	6 36.5	20th 50th 80th	35 CC 84 63 ME	COUNT	23 49.6	20th 50th 80th	822 CC 88 ME	COUNT MEAN	23 73 4	20th 50th 80th	71 C 92 U	COUNT MEAN	6 0 96 9	2014 5014 8014	99 117 149	COUNT MEAN	31 120 5
TOTAL BASIC	20th 50th 80th	25 COUNT 31 38 MEAN	18 32.7	2014 5014 8014	35 CC 45 ME	COUNT MEAN	81 48.5	20th 50th 80th	49 58 75 ME 75	COUNT MEAN	106 61.2	20th 50th 80th	68 82 101 M	COUNT	434 85 2	201h 501h 801h	96 111 131	COUNT	166 114.0

NOTE: This table excludes data for faculty whose total compensation is unknown.

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TABLE 9 (cont.) Compensation of Full-Time Faculty in Private and Public U.S. Medical Schools Faculty with M.D. Degree—All Regions, September 1988 (percentile and mean values in thousands of dollars)

CLINICAL SCI DEPTS		INSTRUCTOR	R	ASSI	IST PROF	ESSOR	ASS	SOC PROFES	SSOR		PROFES	SSOR		CHAIRMA	MAN	
ANESTHESIOLOGY	200 500 500 500 7 7 7 7	59 COUNT 95 118 MEAN	229 91.8	8000 444 444	99 COUN 114 135 MEAN	IT 982	2014 8014 8014	123 COUNT 138 165 MEAN	144 8	8025 802 111	140 COUN 154 178 MEAN	4T 220	200 200 200 200 200 200 200 200 200 200	173 C 206 236 M	COUNT MEAN 2	72
COMMUNITY HEALTH	2000 4444 4444	39 COUNT 52 65 MEAN	7 51.3	2004 2004 8004 8004 8004 8004 8004 8004	60 COUN 82 133 MEAN	IT 43 I 93.8	8000 8000 8000 8000	70 COUNT 81 120 MEAN	r 22 92 4	2014 5014 8014	72 COUN 91 118 MEAN	NT 45 N 94 1	8004 8004 8004 8004	87 C 130 151 M	COUNT MEAN 1	16 21 8
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FAMILY PRACTICE	20th 50th 80th	45 COUNT 58 65 MEAN	52 57.3	201 h 501 h 801 h	60 COUN 71 83 MEAN	(T 464 4 72.0	201 h 501 h 801 h	75 COUNT 88 103 MEAN	r 201 89.9	201 h 501 h 801 h	89 COUN 102 123 MEAN	4T 71 4 103 6	200 200 200 200 200 200 200 200 200 200	114 C 131 147 M	COUNT MEAN 1	69 29.2
MEDICINE	20th 50th 80th	36 COUNT 50 68 MEAN	448 52.1	20th 50th 80th	62 COUN 73 88 MEAN	4T 2517 4 77.5	201 h 501 h 801 h	80 COUNT 93 114 MEAN	r 1692 98 5	2014 5014 8014 717	96 COUNT 113 138 MEAN	NT 1947 N 118 1	2014 50014 8014 8014	137 C 165 200 M	COUNT MEAN 1	116 71.6
EMERGENCY MEDICINE	201h 501h 801h	63 COUNT 74 88 MEAN	33 74.8	201 h 501 h 801 h	74 COUNT 87 100 MEAN	4T 156 4 87.6	2014 5014 8014	90 COUNT 112 128 MEAN	T 58 112.6	2011 5011 8011	101 COUN 118 139 MEAN	NT 9 N 126 0	8000 8000 8000 8000 8000	115 C 139 186 M	COUNT MEAN 1	12 46.1
NEUROLOGY	201 h 501 h 801 h	37 COUNT 46 55 MEAN	42 48.6	2014 5014 8014	60 COUNT 73 90 MEAN	4T 340 4 77.0	2014 5014 8014	80 COUNT 93 111 MEAN	T 217 98.5	204 504 804 h	98 COUN 113 134 MEAN	NT 233 N 1159	2011 5011 8011	133 C 167 186 M	COUNT MEAN 1	70 163.5
OBS-GYNECOLOGY	2014 5014 8014	32 COUNT 50 79 MEAN	136 58.1	2014 5014 8014	80 COUN 96 125 MEAN	NT 483 N 104.3	2014 5014 8014	102 COUNT 123 155 MEAN	T 300 133.0	2014 5014 8014 8014 8014	117 COUN 139 169 MEAN	T 26 146.	8 20th 50th 8 80th	153 C 186 220 M	COUNT MEAN	89 186.1
OPHTHALMOLOGY	201h 501h 801h	24 COUNT 41 60 MEAN	34 45.0	201 h 501 h 801 h	85 COUN 105 138 MEAN	NT 199 N 109.8	20th 50th 80th	108 COUNT 143 196 MEAN	T 115 155.2	201 h 501 h 801 h	120 COUN 156 200 MEAN	NT 132 N 169 5	201h 501h 801h	182 C 204 295 M	OUNT	60 228.2
OTOLARYNGOLOGY	20th 50th 80th	33 COUNT 40 79 MEAN	18 53,2	201 h 501 h 801 h	89 COUN 110 136 MEAN	NT 114 N 114.0	201h 501h 801h	112 COUNT 143 172 MEAN	T 70 142 7	201h 501h 801h	130 COUN 167 204 MEAN	4T 6! 4 169	9 20tn 50th 8 80th	178 C 213 271 M	COUNT MEAN	37 232.4
PATHOLOGY	20th 50th 80th	40 COUNT 49 88 MEAN	48 52.6	20th 50th 80th	61 COUN 73 86 MEAN	NT 485 N 74.0	20th 50th 80th	80 COUNT 93 108 MEAN	T 448 94.7	20th 50th 80th	94 COUN 114 137 MEAN	r 58 116	3 20th 50th 80th	128 153 176 N	OUNT	87 154.2
PEDIATRICS	20th 50th 80th	31 COUNT 46 58 MEAN	180 45.8	2014 5014 8014 8014	56 COUNT 66 78 MEAN	NT 1191 N 68.8	2001 8011 8011	71 COUNT 84 100 MEAN	T 878 87.5	201 501 801 801 801 801 801 801 801 801 801 8	89 COUI 103 124 MEAI	N 107	7 201h 501h 801h	125 C	COUNT	87 150 2

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TABLE 9 (cont.) Compensation of Full-Time Faculty in Private and Public U.S. Medical Schools Faculty with M.D. Degree—All Regions, September 1988 (percentile and mean values in thousands of dollars)

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CHAIRMA	128 151 182	88 105 124	129 153 181	184 212 251	168 223 277	203 249 321	190 230 318	212 280 347	268 469 469	163 213 270	112 143 471	136 175 228
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SOC PR	90 C 104 L 128 M	60 C 70 106 M	77 C 90 106 M	110 C 131 M 161 M	1111 C 145 C 200 M	129 C 160 208 M	131 C 157 213 M	127 C 180 250 M	161 C 210 322 M	108 C 155 1 186 M	86 C 106 126 M	138 N 0
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SSOR	77 91.1	34 79 0	798 75.8	792 108.9	497 119.4	99 123.0	238 147.3	65 144.0	90 175.5	95 120.4	115 83.6	9990 91.1
PROFES	COUNT MEAN	COUNT MEAN	COUNT	COUNT MEAN	COUNT	COUNT	COUNT	COUNT	COUNT	COUNT	COUNT	COUNT
ASSIS'	75 0 85 108 1	130 1 130 1	878 040	86 104 128	90 144 144	100	102 132 181	100 121 175	117 150 200	85 113 151	64 77 103	655 114 114
ASS	2014 5014 8014	20th 50th 80th	20th 50th 80th	2014 5014 8014	20th 50th 80th	201h 501h 801h	2014 5014 8014	2011 5011 8011	2014 5014 8014	201h 501h 801h	20th 50th 80th	8000 800 800 800 800 800 800 800 800 80
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INSTRUCTOR	COUNT MEAN	COUNT MEAN	COUNT	COUNT	COUNT	COUNT	COUNT	COUNT	COUNT	COUNT	COUNT	COUNT
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TABLE 9 (cont.) Compensation of Full-Time Faculty in Private and Public U.S. Medical Schools Faculty with M.D. Degree—All Regions, September 1988 (percentile and mean values in thousands of dollars)

SUBSPECIALTIES		INSTRUCTOR	RO	ASSIST	IST PROFESSOR	SSOR	ASSOC	OC PROFESSOR	SOR		PROFESSOR	SSOR		CH	CHAIRMAN	
CARDIOLOGY	20th 50th 80th	34 COUNT 50 71 MEAN	38 52.7	201 h 501 h 801 h	70 COUNT 83 LI5 MEAN	326 92.4	2014 5014 8014	93 COUNT 108 145 MEAN	223	20th 50th 80th	103 COUN 131 159 MEAN	UNT 2 AN 133	216 2 3 8 85 3 8 85	01 h 15 01 h 16 01 h 18	3 COUNT 9 8 MEAN	169.8
GASTROENTEROLOGY	20th 50th 80th	30 COUNT 60 75 MEAN	19 55.8	20th 50th 80th	70 COUNT 79 95 MEAN	r 145 85.2	20th 50th 80th	86 COUNT 101 129 MEAN	110 105.8	20th 50th 80th	100 COUN 121 142 MEAN	12	131 2 1 5 8	011 13 011 15 8011 17	2 COUNT 5 9 MEAN	r 9 151 3
OTHER MEDICINE	20th 50th 80th	36 COUNT 48 60 MEAN	198 48.6	2011 5011 8011	62 COUNT 71 85 MEAN	r 1187 75.7	20th 50th 80th	80 COUNT 91 105 MEAN	789 94.0	2011 5011 8011	96 COUN 112 133 MEAN	1	927 2 5 5 8	2011 13 5011 16 3011 20	4 COUNT 4 MEAN	r 62 169.4
NEONATOLOGY	20th 50th 80th	47 COUNT 50 76 MEAN	9 57.0	20th 50th 80th	62 COUNT 74 90 MEAN	r 109 79.9	2014 5014 8014	83 COUNT 96 120 MEAN	78 109 8	20th 50th 80th	86 COUN 112 132 MEAN	COUNT MEAN 116	64 65 5 8	201 h 10 501 h 10 801 h 18	8 COUNT 8 6 MEAN	r 8 150 5
PEDIATRIC CARDIOLOG	20th 50th 80th	35 COUNT 59 88 MEAN	60.3 60.3	201 h 501 h 801 h	63 COUNI 69 76 MEAN	r 55 70.4	20th 50th 80th	72 COUNT 88 107 MEAN	57 89 9	20th 50th 80th	95 CO 118 140 ME	COUNT MEAN 118	55 2 8 7 8	201 h 12 501 h 12 801 h 19	7 COUNT 9 0 MEAN	r 6 154.7
OTHER PEDIATRICS	2011 2011 2011 2011 2011 2011 2011 2011	36 COUNT 45 53 MEAN	84 45.5	20th 50th 80th	58 COUNT 66 78 MEAN	r 484 68.8	20th 80th 80th	70 COUNT 82 94 MEAN	364 83 5	20th 50th 80th	89 CO 100 ME	COUNT 3 MEAN 103	35 0	20th 12 50th 14 80th 14	3 COUNT 5 MEAN	r 37 145.5
DIAGNOSTIC RADIOL.	20th 50th 80th	30 COUNT 45 80 MEAN	37 54.8	20th 50th 80th	86 COUNT 104 127 MEAN	T 267 107.9	20th 50th 80th	107 COUNT 131 160 MEAN	. 177 132.7	20th 50th 80th	134 CO 152 181 ME	COUNT J MEAN 157	185 7 2	201h 17 501h 20 801n 23	5 COUNT 0 8 MEAN	T 27 206.3
THERAPEUTIC RADIOL.	2014 5014 8014	83 COUNT 87 110 MEAN	20 90.4	2014 5014 8014	55 COUNT 113 142 MEAN	T 103 119.8	2014 5014 8014 8014	110 COUNT 131 166 MEAN	40 138.8	20th 50th 80th	139 CO 173 203 ME	COUNT MEAN 174	29	201h 18 501h 21 801h 21	3 COUN 6 MEAN	T 29 2266