

## Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society

### “Worthy to serve the suffering”

#### **What is AOA and Why Should I Care?**

Alpha Omega Alpha (AOA) is the only national honor medical society in the world. Its *raison d' être* can be expressed in a phrase: to recognize and perpetuate excellence in the medical profession. It is organized for educational purposes exclusively, and its aims are to promote scholarship and research in medical schools, encouragement of a high standard of character and conduct among medical students and graduates, and the recognition of high attainment in medical science, practice, and related fields.

Election to AOA is a distinction that accompanies a physician throughout his or her entire career. Particularly for the younger physician, the society provides a forum for the exchange of ideas as well as a source for valuable contacts. The OHSU Alpha chapter, chartered in 1923, was recently awarded the distinction of "Chapter of the Year" for its excellent history of service to the community and commitment to continued service.

On a practical basis, AOA serves to identify those students who have excelled, so it may help to open doors during the residency application process. Occasionally, AOA membership is used as part of the "first cut" criteria of competitive residency programs in the their selection of candidates for further consideration, interviews, etc. During residency, AOA membership may also increase the chances for placement in important committee membership and/or leadership positions.

#### **What are the eligibility requirements and how does the election take place?**

Scholastic excellence is a key criterion, but not the only one for election; capacity for leadership, compassion, integrity, fairness in dealing with one's colleagues, and service to the school and community at large are also considered. Students elected to AOA, in the judgment of the local chapter, have shown promise of becoming leaders in their profession.

Students who are in the top quartile of their class are eligible for election to AOA, but the number elected may not exceed one-sixth of the total number in that class expected to graduate. For example, in a class size of 90, up to fifteen students are selected – three in the spring of their junior (MS3) year, and the remainder in the fall of their senior (MS4) year. In this example, the three juniors elected in spring become student officers of the chapter serving as president, and optionally as student secretary and student project coordinator for the following year. Your rank is ascertained from grades (other than pass and fail) using the standard GPA calculation.

The election process depends on input from three sources: a vote of your fellow classmates and from the faculty of the school of medicine, and the resume you submit. Students are invited to nominate up to ten of their classmates whom they feel embody the attributes previously described. The faculty members do the same, given their

perspective of watching you work and interact with patients, families, colleagues, and your mentors. Finally, your resume identifies the honors you have previously received, research in which you have participated, your level of community service, and your extracurricular interests. (This is a great opportunity to practice putting your best foot forward, since you will need this skill during the residency application process; if you don't submit this information, your chances for election are handicapped.) All of this material is compiled and presented to the AOA membership consisting of community physicians and OHSU faculty, house officers, and students.

**The bottom line.**

Membership in AOA is an honor that makes a difference, both now and in the future. Participating in the process fully optimizes your opportunity for election.