The transition is underway to a single accreditation system for graduate medical education (GME), which will allow osteopathic and allopathic medical school graduates to train in residency and fellowship programs accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME). GME experts shared several things medical students need to know as they navigate the new system.

Physician leaders at the ACGME, the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) and the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM) are two years into the effort to align all GME programs under one accreditation system within the ACGME. The transition to a single accreditation system is slated for completion by July 2020.

Will there be a single match?

All programs ultimately will be ACGME-accredited programs, and all physicians in training will meet a common set of milestones and competencies. However, students will continue to participate in a variety of matches, depending on the specialty they are pursuing or if they are in the military, said Lorenzo L. Pence, DO, ACGME senior vice president of osteopathic accreditation. The ACGME does not administer any of the matches.

The National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) is the largest Match program. It will expand further as AOA programs gain ACGME initial accreditation and become listed as part of the NRMP. To date, 15 programs have received initial accreditation. Osteopathic programs that have not started the ACGME accreditation process or have not yet received initial accreditation will still be part of the National Matching Service (NMS) Match.
“All AOA programs are going through ACGME accreditation, and by 2020, all GME programs will need to be ACGME-accredited,” said Stephen C. Shannon, DO, AACOM’s president and CEO.

In addition to the NRMP Match, the Military Match (students from the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences and Health Professions Scholarship Program), San Francisco Match and Urology Match are other matches that students will continue to use to pursue their residencies. Programs associated with any of these matches are already ACGME-accredited programs and will continue as they always have, Dr. Pence said.

If I am studying for my MD, how will single accreditation impact me?

As an allopathic student, you will have more options than previous allopathic students.

Traditionally, students with MDs could not participate in the NMS Match and receive osteopathic training. Under the single accreditation system, the ACGME has created a new designation called osteopathic recognition, Dr. Shannon said. Allopathic students that have met prerequisites that relate to osteopathic medicine will have an opportunity to match, via the NRMP, with a program that contains osteopathic training.

“It will make for a more diverse opportunity for everyone,” Dr. Shannon said.

All ACGME-accredited programs are eligible to apply for osteopathic recognition, Dr. Pence said. To date, 18 programs have achieved that recognition. Some were already dually accredited programs; others were previously only AOA-accredited; and some were ACGME programs that had no prior osteopathic designation, he said.

“We hope all AOA-accredited residencies as they achieve ACGME initial accreditation will pursue osteopathic recognition,” said Dr. Pence. “In addition, we hope to see more ACGME programs apply and achieve osteopathic recognition. MDs who would enter residencies that have achieved osteopathic recognition would have an opportunity to learn about osteopathic medicine, and that would be a good thing for everyone.”

If I am studying for my DO, how will I be impacted?

It will be important for you to talk to your clinical advisor to determine which match will be best for you to enter, Dr. Shannon said.
“Going through the transition (to Single Accreditation) may mean that the best residency program is in the NMS match this year and the NRMP Match next year,” Dr. Shannon said. “Stay aware and ask questions if you have them. And keep an interactive dialogue going with those of us helping put the new system in place. If there are roadblocks, we want to know about it.”

Members of the medical community can email the AACOM, ACGME or AOA.

As a DO or a MD student, how can I best keep on top of the changes underway?

The best thing medical students can do is make sure they are getting their information from the most accurate source, Dr. Shannon said. Information from blogs, forums and social media may not be the best sources. Instead visit the ACGME website, the AACOM Single GME Accreditation System Web page or the AOA website.

The ACGME answers frequently asked questions about the Single GME Accreditation System on its website, and the AACOM also breaks out frequently asked questions about the new system on its website.

In addition, FREIDA Online®, the AMA Residency and Fellowship Database™, posts information about programs that have osteopathic recognition or are newly ACGME accredited. Use the term “AOA” in the keyword search, and the search results will include programs that are dually accredited, ones that have osteopathic recognition and ones that are newly accredited by the ACGME that had been AOA-accredited only.

Why the move to single accreditation?

“Single accreditation makes it fair and equitable for everyone,” Dr. Pence said. “We have made some great strides, and I believe we are moving in the right direction.”

Dr. Shannon added that “we have a lot to learn from each other.”