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## ***Need Help Understanding Accountable Care Organizations?***

# **AAFP, Chapters Create ACO Resources to Aid Family Physicians**

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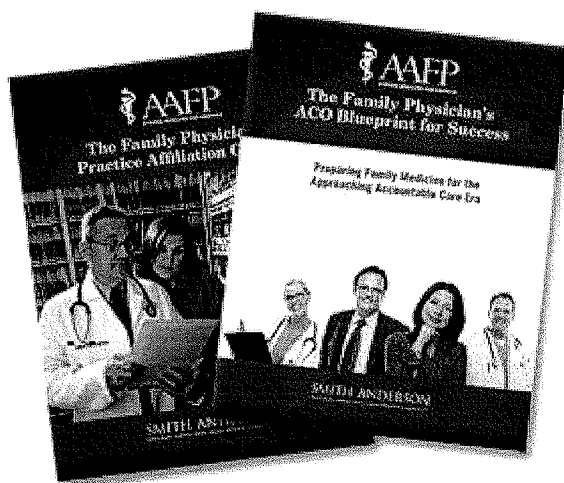
Accountable care organizations, or ACOs, represent a rising star in health care policy circles. That's why the Academy -- in collaboration with six AAFP constituent chapters and with assistance from the North Carolina-based law firm of Smith Anderson -- has created a set of resources to help FPs understand the ACO model.

"Just about everybody is talking about ACOs," says Gail Jones, AAFP's manager of practice management. Jones served as program coordinator for the ACO resource project, which is called Practice Affiliation Options (Members Only), and authored a number of the supporting documents.

"It's important for family physicians to become as knowledgeable as possible so they'll be able to ask -- and answer -- questions when a hospital wants to buy their practice or requests that they join an ACO," says Jones.

"It may not always be in a practice's best interest to do so," she adds.

"When family physicians understand their options, it puts them in a better position to assess their long-term strategic planning. These resources were written specifically for family physicians to equip them with the knowledge they need to make good business decisions."



### **FEDS PROPOSE ACO REGULATIONS**

On March 31, HHS issued a proposed regulation on accountable care organizations (429-page PDF; About PDFs), or ACOs, that aims to build a framework around the ACO model.

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act calls for the creation of an

The new ACO resources include two major pieces that were prepared and distributed by the AAFP with considerable editorial and financial support from the California AFP, the Florida AFP, the Illinois AFP, the North Carolina AFP, the Ohio AFP and the Texas AFP.

One resource, titled "The Family Physician's Practice Affiliation Guide," (Members Only; 21-page PDF; About PDFs) notes that changes in health policy and reimbursement are making many private practice physicians consider

ACO program and mandates that one must be implemented by Jan. 1, 2012. According to a [March 31 HHS news release](#), ACOs will help physicians better coordinate health care and lower health care costs.

The AAFP will read and analyze the proposed rule and comment on it within the time frame allowed -- specifically, within 60 days of publication of the rule in the *Federal Register*.

half provides readers with ACO strategies and analyses that specifically apply to family physicians and their practices.

The resources grew out of a collaborative effort with several AAFP chapters, and Gregory Griggs, M.P.A., EVP of the North Carolina AFP, notes that it wasn't an accident chapters got involved in helping create the ACO resources.

In his chapter's case, he says, "The North Carolina AFP was working on an educational piece for our membership related to accountable care organizations in the state -- and particularly how Community Care of N.C., our state Medicaid care management program, could potentially be used as a vehicle for ACOs."

As part of that effort, the chapter began working with Smith Anderson, a local law firm with some expertise in ACOs, to help develop a toolkit for the state. "As we went through that process, we realized that much of what we were creating could be used to help family physicians on a national level," says Griggs.

Several other chapters, as well as the national Academy, pitched in extra funds to recreate the materials "with a more national scope versus state-specific," according to Griggs, who is an enthusiastic supporter of FPs in ACOs.

"The development of the ACO model is a once-in-a decade opportunity for family physicians," he says. "Primary care is not only at the center of the ACO model, it is the only specialty specifically required to make it work. Done right, the ACO model can greatly benefit patients, family physicians and the entire health care system by improving health care quality and reducing cost."

Other materials on the website family physicians may find valuable include

- [Resources for Employed Physicians](#) (Members Only),
- [State Restrictions on Owning a Practice](#) (Members Only),
- [Interested in ACOs?](#) (Members Only) and
- [Other Practice Affiliation Options](#) (Members Only).

According to Jones, the Academy will continue to assess and update the materials as ACO regulations take shape and members' needs are identified.

affiliations with larger organizations.

The guide analyzes the reasons behind the trends, explores the pros and cons of various options, and gives a thorough analysis of the hospital employment model. According to the guide's introduction, "There are compelling 'offensive' and 'defensive' reasons to consider integration and specific guideposts to assure a successful and sustainable partnership."

A second resource is packaged as "[The Family Physician's ACO Blueprint for Success](#)." (Members Only; 36-page PDF; [About PDFs](#)) Part one of the blueprint walks readers through basic definitions, elements and benefits of an ACO. The second

She urges members to check in with their local chapters for additional resources that are state-specific. "State laws vary when it comes to issues such as practice ownership," she says.

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