

## **Joint General Surgery/Thoracic Surgery (4+3) Pathway**

### **Review Committees for Surgery and Thoracic Surgery**

#### **I. Introduction**

The joint general surgery/thoracic surgery (4+3) pathway is approved by both the American Board of Surgery (ABS) and the American Board of Thoracic Surgery (ABTS). The pathway allows for completion of all general surgery program accreditation requirements and requirements for ABS certification eligibility; all requirements for ABTS certification eligibility will be met when a fellow completes the PGY-7. The joint pathway enhances a fellow's thoracic surgical education without diluting the general surgery educational requirements. Sixty months of general surgery residency are required prior to ABS certification, and the ACGME Program Requirements for Graduate Medical Education in General Surgery apply. The joint candidate must be a general surgery resident and be listed on the general surgery program's Resident Roster in the Accreditation Data System (ADS) for the 60 months of residency, during which time all cases performed by the resident must be entered into the ACGME Resident Case Log System. The underlying concept of this pathway is that the PGY-4 and -5 in the general surgery residency are transitional or "cross training" years that will simultaneously fulfill the required general surgery curriculum and begin thoracic surgical education in preparation for a thoracic surgery fellowship. The enhancement in this format is an alteration of the clinical assignments during the last 24 months of the general surgical experience (PGY-4 and PGY-5) to include specific rotations within general surgery that are directly applicable to the practice of thoracic surgery.

Note: The American Osteopathic Board of Surgery (AOBS) does not require pre-approval of osteopathic residents/fellows who participate in a joint surgery/thoracic surgery pathway and who intend to take AOBS certifying examinations. Program directors will be required to attest that an osteopathic resident/fellow has completed all education and training required to be eligible for AOBS certification.

#### **II. Candidate Eligibility**

A (prospective) resident may apply as early as the fourth year in medical school but must apply before completion of the PGY-3 in general surgery.

Applicants must complete all general surgery and thoracic surgery education and training at the same institution.

Applicants must be in good standing, and not subject to any current disciplinary actions.

The general surgery program director must attest and ensure that the applicant will receive a balanced experience in the principal content areas of surgery throughout the 60 months of general surgery education.

After initial approval of the joint pathway at an institution, the thoracic surgery program director must inform the Review Committee for Thoracic Surgery each time an individual

is accepted into the thoracic surgery fellowship using the 4+3 pathway. The informational correspondence must include:

1. details about the resident's eligibility, including all previous graduate medical education (GME) experience;
2. details about the resident's/fellow's proposed graduation from both the general surgery program and the thoracic surgery program; and,
3. confirmation that the programs do not require an increase in complement to include the resident/fellow in the pathway.

### **III. Eligibility for Certification**

#### **ABS**

Following successful completion of the general surgery program and meeting ABS certification requirements, residents may apply to take the general surgery qualifying examination. Candidates who are successful on the qualifying examination may sit for the general surgery certifying examination.

#### **ABTS**

Eligibility for ABTS certification will not occur until the end of the PGY-7, following successful completion of the thoracic surgery program. All ABS and ABTS rules and procedures apply.

#### **AOBS**

Following successful completion of the general surgery and thoracic surgery programs and meeting AOBS requirements, residents/fellows may apply to take the qualifying examination.

### **IV. Oversight**

Any general surgery and thoracic surgery programs meeting the requirements outlined below may apply for approval of a joint pathway. The progress and success of the programs will be continually evaluated to ensure equivalency or superiority as compared with conventional residencies.

The review and approval of pathway applications will be the sole responsibility of the Review Committees for Surgery and Thoracic Surgery. Program directors will be asked to report any problems to the applicable Review Committee and following implementation, also report the performance of resident/fellow participants on the in-service, qualifying, and certifying examinations.

### **V. Outcome Measures**

Specific outcome measures are used to evaluate a joint pathway's success, including:

1. first-time pass rates on the qualifying and certifying examinations of the ABS and ABTS for graduates of this pathway compared with their peers in conventional programs;
2. first-time pass rates on the qualifying and certifying examinations of the AOBS for general surgery and cardiothoracic surgery for graduates of this pathway compared

with their peers in conventional programs;

3. operative experience records of graduates of this pathway as compared with those of other residents in the same institution (Note: all residents/fellows in this pathway must meet the minimum requirements of both Review Committees and Boards regarding the volume, variety, and breadth of operative experience); and,
4. measures of resident/fellow satisfaction, including the attrition rate of residents/fellows in this pathway compared to their peers in conventional residencies.

## **VI. Pathway Format Requirements**

1. Only those institutions currently possessing both an ACGME-accredited general surgery residency program and an ACGME-accredited thoracic surgery fellowship program are eligible to participate. The designated institutional official (DIO) of the Sponsoring Institution must submit a letter of commitment and support for the joint pathway with the application. The application must be co-signed by the DIO, the general surgery program director, and the thoracic surgery program director.
2. The program directors of both programs must provide documentation of their individual commitment and ability to meet the requirements.
3. The Sponsoring Institution, the general surgery program, and the thoracic surgery program must be in substantial compliance with the ACGME Institutional and Program Requirements. Both programs must hold a status of Continued Accreditation. (each Review Committee will review the accreditation histories of the Sponsoring Institution and programs; this information is routinely appended to an application by ACGME staff members.)
4. Documentation must be submitted to demonstrate that both programs meet or exceed requirements for first-time takers of the ABS and ABTS certifying examinations, and where applicable, the AOBS examinations.
5. The application must include an overview of the curriculum provided for all education and training years that has been approved by both program directors. The curriculum must clearly identify the required components as explained below. This curriculum will be independently reviewed and approved by both Review Committees.
6. **General Surgery Content Areas**  
The rotations denoted below with an asterisk (\*) have been identified by the ABTS as areas of expertise specifically applicable to the education of a thoracic surgeon. It is in these areas that appropriate “cross training” can occur within the last 24 months of general surgery residency. These specific areas are already included within the content of a standard general surgery residency.

**a. Principal Content Areas**

Abdomen  
Alimentary tract\*  
Critical care\*  
Endocrine surgery  
Head and neck  
Pediatric surgery  
Skin, soft tissue, and breast  
Surgical oncology\*  
Transplantation\*  
Trauma/burns  
Vascular surgery\*

**b. Secondary Content Areas**

Endoscopy\*  
Plastic surgery  
Thoracic surgery\*

**c. Technical Experiences**

Laparoscopy  
Advanced laparoscopy\*

**d. Other Specialty Areas**

Anesthesia  
Gynecology  
Neurological surgery  
Orthopaedic surgery  
Urology

**7. Requirements by PGY**

- a. Thirty-six of the first 48 months of the general surgery program must be documented in areas 6a, b, and c above.
- b. Twelve additional months will be spent in the principal content areas in the PGY-4 and -5 (6a above).
- c. During the PGY-4 and -5, a minimum of 12 months must be spent as a chief resident in general surgery in the principal content areas (6a above). Thus, the total Content Area time will be 48 of the 60 general surgery months.
- d. The majority of the chief year must occur during the PGY-5.  
(Note: A chief resident rotation is defined as one in which the resident is the most senior resident on the service, is directly responsible for overseeing all patients on that service, and reports directly to the responsible attending physician. The chief resident must be responsible for pre-operative, operative, and post-operative care of patients on that service. The volume and complexity of cases performed must be appropriate for the chief resident level.)
- e. No more than six of the 24 months in the PGY-4 and -5 may be devoted exclusively to any one of the principal content areas in general surgery.
- f. Those rotations designated as important to the preparation of a thoracic surgeon may comprise a minimum of eight months, but no more than 12 months, of the PGY-4 and -5. Some of these rotations will be primary content areas (e.g., vascular surgery, surgical critical care), some will be secondary components (e.g., thoracic surgery, endoscopy, laparoscopic surgery), and some will be in areas not currently classified in the general surgery curriculum (e.g., cardiac surgery). All cases performed during this time must be entered

into the general surgery Case Log. Some of the thoracic cases may not count for general surgery requirements. When the resident becomes a thoracic surgery fellow (PGY-6), a request should be made to ADS to transfer the thoracic surgery cases performed during this time to the thoracic surgery Case Log.

It is anticipated that these eight to 12 months of thoracic surgery educational preparation will be assigned throughout the PGY-4 and -5; however, the majority of these assignments must occur in PGY-4.

- g. All 24 months of the PGY-4 and -5 must be spent in clinical assignments and may not include research rotations.

#### 8. Attestations Regarding Resident Classification and Supervision

- a. During the PGY-1-4, the general surgery program director will be directly responsible for joint pathway residents regarding evaluation and supervision. During the PGY-5, both program directors will share these responsibilities.
- b. Residents must be classified as categorical general surgery residents on the general surgery roster during the PGY-1-5.
- c. In the PGY-6-7, fellows must be listed on the thoracic surgery roster as thoracic surgery fellows.
- d. The general surgery program director will be required to provide signature attestation of these residents' successful completion of the general surgery program.

#### **Submit all materials via email to:**

Kelsey Sill, MHA  
Associate Executive Director  
Review Committees for Surgery and Thoracic Surgery  
[ksill@acgme.org](mailto:ksill@acgme.org)