All family medicine residents are required to maintain a continuity practice in an approved family medicine center (FMC) and achieve minimum targets for patient encounters. In the past, minimum periods of time in the FMC were defined in the program requirements, but these have now been replaced with target numbers of patient encounters. As residency programs come under increasing pressure to address service needs on patient care services, some program directors face requests by hospital administration to benchmark their requirements for resident schedules in the FMC against national standards. Since no such standards presently exist, the authors decided to determine the average frequency with which US family medicine residents are currently scheduled in their FMC continuity practices to address accreditation requirements.

**Methods**

Each year the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) conducts a detailed census of all US family medicine residency programs, including questions that are used to populate the online residency directory. The residency directory is publicly available on the AAFP website, and the data is aggregate at the program level. Consequently, this study is considered exempt from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight.

Using the data set from the 2011 AAFP annual residency census and residency directory questionnaire, the frequency of reported resident scheduling in the FMC continuity practice was extracted. Although the census itself achieves a 100% response rate, not all programs respond to all of the residency directory questions. In this case, for reported time in the FMC, an 84% (380 out of 450 programs) response rate was achieved.

**Results:** Family medicine residency programs currently schedule residents in their FMC continuity practice substantially more often than previously required.

**Conclusions:** To meet current accreditation requirements, family medicine residency programs schedule residents in their FMC continuity practices more than previously required minimums.

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Results
The results of the data analysis are summarized in Table 1. First year family medicine residents (PGY-1) were previously required to spend one half day in the FMC each week, but they are currently scheduled an average of 1.44 half days per week. Second-year family medicine residents (PGY-2) were previously required to spend two half days in the FMC each week, but they are currently scheduled an average of 2.89 half days per week. Third-year family medicine residents (PGY-3) were previously required to spend three half days in the FMC each week, but they are currently scheduled an average of 3.99 half days per week. Hence, family medicine programs currently schedule residents in their FMC continuity practice an average of 41% more often than previously required.

Discussion
No prior studies that examine the frequency with which family medicine programs schedule their residents in the continuity practice setting have been found prior to this one. The high level of response rate from the annual residency census makes the data determined by this study to be of higher reliability than a simple sample of programs. One recognized limitation is that this self-reported data from residency programs is presented as an approximation of the average frequency of scheduling for a typical resident for any given year of training, realizing that the actual frequency for any individual resident may vary somewhat. This data suggests, however, that in order to meet current accreditation requirements, US family medicine residency programs presently schedule residents in their FMC continuity practices more frequently than previously required minimums.

Table 1: Half-Day Sessions in Residency Continuity Practice*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2001 ACGME Minimum Weekly Requirement for FMC (Half Days)</th>
<th>Mean Half Days (SD) Per Week Reported in 2011</th>
<th>Percent increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PGY-1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.44 (0.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGY-2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.89 (0.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGY-3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.99 (0.66)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ACGME—Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education
FMC—family medicine center
SD—standard deviation
PGY—postgraduate year
* Residency Directory responses—July 2011 (n=380)

References