



## **Institutions train professionals with an eye on the future**

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Increased technology, escalating costs and a focus on preventive care and wellness have transformed the health care industry. Educational institutions that train professionals are working to keep up with these changes.

These colleges and universities continue to modify, update and expand curriculum to prepare students to enter an industry that constantly changes and challenges its applications, standards and technology.

"The challenges will be to foresee the impact of these changes and make changes to the business models that health care works under right now," says Linda Underhill, chairwoman of the service systems and health administration graduate program at Rochester Institute of Technology.

A university known more for its engineering programs than for health care programs, RIT has dramatically revamped and revised its curriculum to address these needs.

"We've included in our core courses a specific course on health and wellness, which is the orientation that is going to be focused on in the future. In addition, we have strengthened our concentrations of health care leadership and finance in health care operations," Underhill says.

This will include a new concentration, healing hospitality, which she says will focus on customer service—a major component of the quality and cost of health care that many major providers are currently focusing on to receive the best reimbursement possible.

Additionally, the College of Health Sciences and Technology, the newest and ninth college at RIT, will meet the need of medical technological advances by offering academic programs in biomedical sciences, health systems administration, medical illustration, nutrition/dietetics, physician assistant and diagnostic medical sonography. These programs aim to prepare students in some of the fastest-growing medical technological fields. The Bureau of Labor Statistics says employment in the sonography field alone is expected to grow 44 percent in the next eight to 10 years.

"Ultrasound will see an increase in demand for its services due to the aged baby boomers and the pathological states associated with age-related diseases," says Hamad Ghazle, director, professor and advanced practice sonographer at RIT.

With a dynamic and flexible curriculum, Ghazle says, the program will stay ahead of the curve by adding a new ultrasound program that will focus on cardiac ultrasound, or echocardiography. He adds that the RIT ultrasound program is planning to expand its clinical facilities to include more scanning stations and equipment and reduce the faculty/student ratio. Ghazle says adding new curricula and increasing clinical facilities will allow the program to admit more students, produce skilled professional sonographers and alleviate the shortages in this field. At present, the program is at full capacity.

The same is true for the Wegmans School of Pharmacy at St. John Fisher College. Currently, there are 80 students in the four-year program. Since workforce analysis indicates the school is meeting the demands of the pharmacy workforce, the class size will not change. Class content will.

"Vital to pharmacy education is to make sure that the training of our students is preparing them for current and future practice of pharmacy," says Scott Swigart, dean of the Wegmans School of Pharmacy.

Swigart believes there will be a continued increase in the use of technology in classrooms, with less time spent on traditional lectures and more time on active and integrated learning that will better prepare students. He also says the student in a health care professional program needs more opportunities for interactive learning with students in other disciplines.

At present, the pharmacy school provides many opportunities for its students to participate on multidisciplinary health care teams at its partner experiential sites, which emphasize the team approach to health care delivery. This interprofessional education, Swigart says, is the wave of the future. The St. John Fisher program is identifying opportunities to develop this trend further.

The interprofessional approach to health care education is also prominent in the health and human services programs at Nazareth College of Rochester.

Shirley Szekeres, dean of Nazareth College's School of Health and Human Services and chairwoman of nursing, says Nazareth is the only Rochester-based college that offers a unique array of allied health professional programs. These include: nursing, nurse educator, pathology, occupational therapy, and pre-medical, dental and veterinary programs. Its course work integrates authentic on-campus clinical experiences working with clients' real health issues.

The college is evaluating a number of potential new degree programs. It also is expanding community partnerships and campus clinical services that support underserved segments of the population. According to Szekeres, the creation of a new Wellness and Rehabilitation Institute will increase Nazareth's ability to respond to changes in the health care industry as well.

The college, like others, is working to stay abreast of changes to educate and prepare a new generation for the ever-changing and growing health care industry. It is also essential for attracting prospective health profession students.

While area health care programs may differ, efforts to recruit students to these programs are very similar: open houses, high school visits, presentations and college career events.

Says Szekeres, "As we look to the future, one thing is certain: A transformed health care system will require a transformed workforce."

*Kathi Gunio is a Rochester-area freelance writer. 11/9/12 (c) 2012 Rochester Business Journal. To obtain permission to reprint this article, call 585-546-8303 or email [service@rbj.net](mailto:service@rbj.net).*