

Colleges tailor health care programs to match changes in marketplace

BY MIKE SCOTT

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Job growth in health care is spurring universities to create or expand specialized degree or residency programs for both clinical and non-clinical professionals.

Oakland University, the **University of Detroit Mercy**, **Walsh College** and **Wayne State University** are among institutions that have seen enrollment rise in certain health care disciplines. These programs appeal both to health care professionals and students desiring a career change.

Changes in health care — including health care reform, regulatory needs, electronic medical records and reimbursement considerations — are just some of the reasons for the uptick.

Walsh College in Troy offers courses in finance and business as part of a Health Service Administration specialization under its MBA or master of management degrees. It added these courses two years ago and plans to add more as industry trends dictate, said Linda Wiechowski, Walsh College chairwoman and professor.

Walsh is developing a health care informatics course by 2013.

Economics-driven

“There is a whole different way of looking at the world of economics in health care with issues such as cost containment and revenue differentiation,” Wiechowski said. Future finance courses might provide more detail on regulations recommended by the **Healthcare Financial Management Association** and other trade organizations, she said.

The college's Health Economics and Health Administration Finance courses include reviews of reimbursement, cost containment, revenue determination, capital project analysis, business ethics

and more, Wiechowski said.

UDM started its health management information undergraduate degree program in September. Program Chairwoman Judie Hetsler said the number of students is expected to rise along with market demand.

National demand for health information management professionals will grow 20 percent over the next four years, according to the **Bureau of Labor Statistics**, but Hetsler said she believes those estimates are understated.

“The likelihood of Medicare penalties by 2014 is a huge incentive to invest in this knowledge,” Hetsler said.

Electronic medical records

UDM's health management information program is for students interested in the legal, regulatory, ethical, reimbursement and management aspects of health care and in managing information, Hetsler said. **Davenport University** and **Ferris State University** also offer such programs.

“It's designed to meet the specialized and growing needs of two dynamic industries: health care and information management,” Hetsler said. “It's a very rapidly changing industry. Just look at the iPhone to see how fast the technology is changing.”

This program used to be a “medical records” undergraduate degree at UDM, but the focus has changed because of electronic medical records. Graduates would likely be hired as data analytical managers, directors or vice presidents at a hospital or health system.

“These professionals will be like the privacy officers of a system,” Hetsler said. “They will likely be the most knowledgeable person in the organization on (health care

privacy) regulations.”

That is important because regulations continue to be developed that impact advances in EMRs. And even more important to hospitals and health systems: Medicare now rewards providers that can document sustainable and “meaningful” EMR policies. Within two years, providers that don't show meaningful EMR policies are expected to be financially penalized by Medicare, Hetsler said.

Education and changing roles

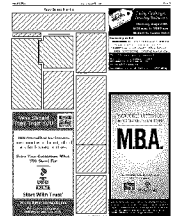
OU has developed a nurse practitioner graduate degree program that it also says is taking on increased importance. As fewer physicians enter such fields as family practice and OB/GYN, nurse practitioners are expected to handle even more clinician work in primary care fields, said Kerri Schuling, dean for the OU School of Nursing.

“These nurse practitioners will help fill in the gaps of being more of a mainstay in clinical decision making,” Schuling said. “It will be common to walk into a doctor's office and see them taking more of a visible role.

“The demand is increasing exponentially. If it's an area you are interested in, it is an area (where) you can find a job that pays well,” Schuling said.

OU plans to expand its nurse practitioner program to include a doctor of nursing practice post-master's degree certificate.

In May 2011, the **Association of American Medical Colleges** predicted a shortage of 40,000 primary care physicians in the coming years, as baby boomers continue to age, Schuling said. Like physicians, physician assistants also are flocking to medical specialties that pay higher salaries, caused in large part by health care reform and fed-



eral reimbursement changes.

"Nurses, though, often stay in those primary care areas, so nurse practitioners today need to have an increased and solid grasp of many issues from health policy to reimbursement and an understanding of the general landscape of the industry," Schuiling said. "They need to learn how to be more of a team player within a practice."

Recent job growth for pharmacists has waned as supply has begun to match demand, said WSU associate professor David Bach, who also works as corporate vice president, pharmacy services, for the **Detroit Medical Center**. He said job opportunities are increasing for graduates of Wayne State's pharmacy management and pharmacy informatics degrees, which are available as degree and residency programs.

"It's important to have dual knowledge because it can help hospitals and physicians optimize care and therapy for their clients, especially in terms of what medications to take and what other factors will impact (the proper) drugs to use," Bach said.

Wayne State is looking at devel-

oping a dual-degree program for a doctorate in pharmacy coupled with a graduate degree in business administration and/or health services, Bach said. Such degree programs could include a specialty residency in the DMC's pharmacy department.

"I see that as having more interest to students in the next five years, because the opportunities for graduates with such a broad background will be greater," Bach said.

All area universities create courses based on feedback of in-

structors, students and advisory boards composed of statewide employers, educators said.

"(The information) provided in these courses (is) updated more frequently than many of our other courses, because of the changing nature of the industry," said Sheila Ronis, professor and director of MBA/Master of Management programs at Walsh College. "I know we are offering more (sections) of these courses than I originally had expected this early."



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Linda Wiechowski, Walsh College