JOINING FORCES FOR THE GREATER GOOD

by Windsor Westbrook Sherrill, Ph.D.

TO ACHIEVE NECESSARY HEALTH CARE TRANSFORMATION IN THE U.S. DELIVERY SYSTEM, ISSUES RELATED TO ITS QUALITY, ACCESS AND COST MUST BE ADDRESSED. THERE IS NO BETTER WAY TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES THAN THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS — PARTICULARLY THOSE BETWEEN HEALTH CARE RESEARCH AND CLINICAL PRACTICE.

Focusing on that goal, Clemson University and Greenville Health System (GHS) announced last summer the establishment of a health care research powerhouse that makes Clemson the primary research collaborator for GHS and the research administrator for the health system's research initiatives.

Under the agreement, both organizations work collectively to leverage existing research expertise at Clemson with clinical opportunities offered by GHS, one of the largest health care systems in the Southeast.

The agreement provides significant opportunities for Clemson faculty to engage in health and medical research, and opens the door to increased federal research funding by partnering with physicians and researchers at GHS.

Last October, the initiative was further commemorated when GHS announced the formation of the Clinical University and its membership in the Association of Academic Health Systems. Clemson is one of three primary university partners in the GHS Clinical University, along with the University of South Carolina and Furman University.

The College of HEHD is a primary player in this agreement. With nursing and public health sciences programs and other disciplines such as recreation and education that have tangible health implications, this agreement puts HEHD in a great position to build upon its long relationship with GHS.

The college is already engaged with GHS in a variety of ways. HEHD is a leader in the Institute for the Advancement of Health Care (IAHC), the health services research entity partnering GHS with Clemson and the University of South Carolina. IAHC research and scholarly activities address issues of major concern in the health care system, and IAHC scholars work with practitioners to translate research to clinical practice at GHS, facilitating health care delivery system improvements.

The institute focuses on three areas: investigating patient-centered models of care, comparing the effectiveness of interventions to inform policy and studying methods to build workforce capacity. These initiatives serve to improve health care delivery, transforming the education of health care providers and creating care models that address health and well-being.

One example of the college's involvement in IAHC and its mission is the Department of Public Health Science's cardiovascular technology (CVT) concentration. The department offers the degree in cooperation with GHS, and the program is the only one in the nation that combines cardiovascular technology training with a comprehensive education in public health sciences and health care leadership.

This combination prepares students to enter the health workforce with an understanding of both disease process and health care leadership, equips students to make an immediate impact in the health care field upon graduation and builds health care workforce capacity.

Another example of the partnership bearing fruit is research collaboration between HEHD faculty and GHS clinicians. One such example is Cheryl Dye, an IAHC Scholar and director of Clemson's Institute for Engaged Aging. She has a longstanding research collaboration with Dr. Pham, a GHS geriatrician and director of the GHS Center for Success in Aging. The Clemson faculty member and GHS provider have found a common interest in research projects related to care transition for the elderly and health coaching models designed to improve care for older adults and lower cost of care.

Most recently, Dye and Pham worked together on a major research conference at GHS. The conference, "Transforming Healthcare with Compassionate Healthcare of Our Aging Community," brought together geriatric practitioners and researchers from throughout the region and laid a foundation for the designation of Greenville as a "Compassionate Care" community.

Partnership, indeed, has been the key to success in the relationship between the College of HEHD and GHS as faculty and practitioners engage to impact health care. With the new GHS-Clemson research partnership and the college's long history of health-related research and education, the future is bright for the partnership, and the health and well-being of people in the Upstate and beyond will be better for it.

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