



Rosalie Phillips

Tufts Health Care Institute: A Good Partner

Unique Organization Fills a Gap in Medical Education

The field of medical science is growing exponentially. Seasoned physicians point to the increasing size of medical textbooks as evidence that knowledge has mushroomed, and they must keep pace. But there is another challenge, beyond maintaining clinical skills, that is shared by both recent medical school graduates and experienced practitioners: How does one practice efficiently and effectively in a complex and evolving health care system?

This question has never been more pertinent. In 1995, it led to the creation of Tufts Health Care Institute (THCI), a nonprofit organization established by Tufts Health Plan and Tufts University School of Medicine (TUSM) to fill a significant education gap. The initiative grew out of the vision of Harris Berman, M.D., president and CEO of Tufts Health Plan at the time, and Morton Madoff, M.D., then dean of TUSM.

"Drs. Berman and Madoff recognized that physicians were leaving medical school and residency superbly trained in medical science but lacking a sufficient understanding of the context in which they were going to practice," says Rosalie Phillips, THCI's executive director. The health plan provided a start-up grant and turned to Phillips, who recruited a staff and began to develop and implement educational curricula and programs.

"THCI was the first educational partnership between a medical school and a network model

health maintenance organization," she says. "From the beginning, faculty and attendees from both inside and outside the medical school and health plan have been invited to participate in THCI programs."

Before long, the rest of the medical education community caught up to what THCI was doing. In 1999, the American Board of Medical Specialties and the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education defined an expanded set of required physician competencies, including systems-based practice, practice-based learning and improvement, and communication skills — domains that THCI was already addressing. THCI's educational activities have evolved from primarily live courses and conferences to incorporate online learning for health professionals; performance improvement through education; special initiatives, such as a hand hygiene project with Tufts Medical Center, funded by Tufts Health Plan; and bringing multiple stakeholders together to address challenging issues.

THCI's "mini" residency rotation, a four-day program held at Tufts Health Plan, welcomes two dozen senior residents each year to receive a practical introduction to contemporary issues, including health care organization and finance, new technology assessment, performance measurement and reporting, and pay-for-performance incentives. It is a unique opportunity for residents to delve into the realities of practicing today. "Every resident in the country should attend," said one trainee.

“Information Mastery: A Practical Approach to Evidence-Based Medicine” is an interactive workshop that provides strategies and skills to manage the voluminous medical literature that supports sound clinical practice. “In this course, as in all our work, our goal is to help physicians not feel like victims of the health care system,” says Phillips, “but rather, empowered to improve performance in their own practices and in the system as a whole. As a result, their overall professional satisfaction increases.”

The relationship between THCI and Tufts Health Plan remains close. As president and CEO of the health plan, James Roosevelt Jr., also serves as co-chair of THCI. “The Institute provides essential education and performs meaningful evaluation—all of which have a positive impact on the clinician community,” says Roosevelt. “The decision almost 15 years ago to create THCI was not just visionary; it was a sound investment that has paid dividends for practitioners and patients alike.”

That is the goal, Phillips adds. “Quality and efficiency mandates, patient satisfaction measurement, transparency—all these forces have combined to make what THCI does more valuable to practitioners, to their patients and practices, and to health plans. The education we provide gets into the DNA of senior physicians, to be passed to future generations.”



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