

A New MBA Program in Healthcare Management for the Pacific Northwest

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In January 2009, Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) and Portland State University (PSU) launched their joint MBA in Healthcare Management. This program evolved from the existing graduate Certificate in Healthcare Management offered by the OHSU Division of Management (a unit in the OHSU School of Medicine) and the MBA+ degree offered by the PSU School of Business Administration. The need for this program was discerned through a series of interviews that were conducted with healthcare executives in the Portland metropolitan area, focus group studies with potential candidates for healthcare management graduate studies, and the expressed wishes of a number of graduates from the Certificate in Healthcare Management program.

In developing the program, we established several design criteria:

- The program had to deliver the fundamental business knowledge, skills, and tools that would be found in any MBA program.
- Healthcare would be thoroughly integrated throughout the curriculum. Specifically, healthcare would be the primary source for cases, examples,

and guest speakers and not just an add-on via electives.

- The program must recognize that healthcare in the United States is greatly in need of transformation and that effective management has an important role to play in that transformation. For us this meant that the graduates of the MBA in Healthcare Management must be equipped to be change agents within both their own organizations and within the broader healthcare system. This also meant that where appropriate we would incorporate best practices from other industries.
- The program must be designed for working professionals in healthcare, including clinicians (physicians, nurses, physician assistants, dentists, etc.) with managerial roles and non-clinicians with roles in the business aspects of healthcare delivery (e.g., finance, IT, safety, operations, logistics). Moreover, the program should be applicable to the broad spectrum of the healthcare industry, including provider organizations (hospitals, clinics, private practices, etc.), health insurance companies, pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturers, etc.

The criterion related to transformation was particularly important, and we relied heavily on what the Institute of Medicine had to say in this regard—specifically *To Err is Human* (IOM, 2000), *Crossing the Quality Chasm* (IOM, 2001), and *Health Professions Education—A Bridge to Quality* (IOM 2002). According to the IOM, American healthcare must become safe, effective, patient-centered, timely, efficient, and equitable. To achieve these aims, healthcare professionals must embody five specific core competencies: provide patient-centered care, work in interdisciplinary teams, employ evidence-based practice, apply quality improvement, and utilize informatics. All of this is embodied in what Don Berwick, CEO of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, calls the Triple Aim, which is to enhance the individual patient experience, promote the health of the population, and control or reduce costs. (Berwick et al, 2008)

The MBA curriculum that was ultimately developed weaves these ideas throughout the curriculum and trains individuals to manage to the Triple Aim. The curriculum is composed of six themes:

- Understanding the healthcare industry
- Leadership and management

in healthcare

- Financial management in healthcare
- Operations and quality management in healthcare
- Marketing, business planning, and strategy
- Application projects and capstone

The program is designed to serve busy, working professionals, who will complete the degree on a part-time basis over a three-year period. The learning modality is a hybrid of online and face-to-face learning. Over an eleven week quarter, students gather at OHSU's South Waterfront campus for two week-

ends while participating online for the remainder of the quarter through OHSU's online learning platform. This makes the program accessible to anyone within a day's travel of Portland. The online part of the program is highly interactive and promotes collaborative learning among participants. In large measure, the role of the formal instructor is more one of facilitation than teaching, and adult learning principles guide the program. Our experience to date has indicated that the hybrid learning format is highly effective and user friendly.

The first cohort of the program launched in January 2009, and

subsequent cohorts will begin each September. The September 2009 cohort will be full at 30 participants—a size which was chosen to optimize learning. Participants in the first two cohorts represent both the breadth of roles found in the healthcare industry as well as the breadth of organizations. Complete details about the program can be found at www.HealthcareMBA.pdx.edu. Interested individuals are also welcome to call 503-346-0370 for further information.

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