

Management Education Partnerships Help Ease Path to Privatization

When physicians in the Czech Republic purchase ultrasound machines or other equipment, they are most likely considering how the new technology will improve patient care, not how much the investment will depreciate over time. That job would fall to a health care manager in the US, but clinical settings in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) still rely on nurses and doctors to serve as managers--a dual responsibility that can stretch resources to a breaking point.

As CEE nations continue on the path to privatizing their health care systems, the need for health care management is becoming increasingly critical, and AIHA's newest partnerships are designed to ease that transition by building a capacity to educate health managers.

The program includes five partnerships in four CEE nations (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and Albania), each of which signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) earlier this year. Partners will participate in student-faculty exchanges, establishment of education resource centers and teleconferencing capability, curriculum and faculty development, design and marketing of in-service and continuing education for current managers (largely physicians), and improvement of teaching methods.

Ensuring efficient use of technology is one area where expanded management skills can make a difference in CEE countries, according to Mary Paterson, PhD, associate professor of health administration at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas and coordinator of the Bohemia-Nevada partnership. On a recent trip to the Czech Republic, for example, she observed an ultrasound machine being underutilized in a private clinic because only one physician was trained to use it.

"They are clearly impressed with how physicians and administrators work hand-in-hand [in the US]," she said of her Czech counterparts. "They are very sophisticated and are acquiring technology, but there is no infrastructure to support it."

The five health management education partnerships are listed below, with a brief description of their individual goals:

Olomouc-Richmond

Palack University/Faculty of Medicine and Nursing (Olomouc)
Virginia Commonwealth University/Medical College of Virginia (Richmond, Virginia)

Bohemia-Nevada

South Bohemia University/Faculty of Management (Jindichv Hradec) and Faculty of Health and Social Care (Cesk Budjovice)
University of Education/Faculty of Management and Information Technology (Hradec Krlov)

Additional Participants: Purkyne Medical Academy (Hradec Krlov)

Postgraduate Medical School, Ministry of Health (Prague)

University of Nevada (Las Vegas and Reno, Nevada)

The two Czech partnerships will be closely coordinated to maximize the use of resources and to take advantage of the partners' particular strengths. Both partnerships will focus on developing courses in health service management for students of medicine and nursing, short courses for health management practitioners and a master's degree program in health services management. Both partnerships signed MOUs at a joint ceremony February 5 in Prague.

Slovakia-Scranton

Trnava University/School of Nursing and Social Care (Trnava)
University of Matej Bel/Economics Faculty (Banska Bystrica)
Health Management School (Bratislava)
University of Scranton (Scranton, Pennsylvania)

In addition to developing course content, partners plan to convene an international symposium on health care reform in Slovakia, and produce a journal of health management and public health. The publication of such a journal would be a first for Slovakia. U.S. Ambassador to the Slovak Republic Theodore Russell attended the MOU signing February 9.

Romania-Chicago

University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Carol Davila" (Bucharest)
Institute of Hygiene, Public Health, Health Services and Management (Bucharest)
University of Chicago (Chicago, Illinois)

Partners will focus on implementing a needs assessment for health management education, developing health management course content, and developing case studies relating to the transition of the Romanian health care system. The MOU was signed February 22.

Tirana-New York

University of Tirana/Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Economics (Tirana)
Albanian Ministry of Health and Environmental Protection (Tirana)
New York University (New York, New York)

Creating a management policy analysis capability and improving in-service management training for health care practitioners within the Albanian Ministry of Health, and developing a business plan to establish graduate programs in health management at the University of Tirana will be goals for the partnership. The MOU was signed in early April.