

Past, Present and Future of Allied Health Professions in Florida

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The Allied Health Professions have assumed a primary role in health care delivery as a result of enveloping reform in national health policy. Approximately 60% of the 10.5 million members of the American health care workforce are allied health workers. As the need for health care delivery expands allied health professionals must be trained to offer quality and cost-effective care. Allied health education must, therefore, have a strong background in the basic sciences which will enhance problem-solving skills and critical thinking. Most importantly the educational process must ensure that the health worker's care is given with a compassionate and caring attitude.

Our ultimate goal is the belief in the worth and dignity of individuals and their natural right to fulfill their potential in life. The cohorts of students trained twenty five years ago at Florida International University and the most recent cohorts being trained at Nova Southeastern University in the area of Allied Health are a good example of the efforts being done in order to fulfill the needs of the communities in the State of Florida.

There are other programs at other universities and community colleges in South Florida but I am not going to refer to them today.

My involvement in Allied Health started in June, 1971, at the time we were to open a brand new university in Miami, Florida, that is - Florida International University - FIU for short. This university was an upper division institution that was formed to complement the lower divisions of the largest community college in the U.S., Miami Dade Community College.

At the time, in the School of Health and Social Services, as mandated by the Board of Regents, the programs we were to have for training students were: Medical Technology, Health Sciences, Social Work, Dietetics and Nutrition, Nursing, Criminal Justice, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy and Medical Records - Health Education. Our school of Health and Social Services had

over one thousand, five hundred (1,500) students enrolled. Two years later, I added a Program in Public Health.

Someone could argue that all of these nine disciplines did not fit well together. All I can tell you is that as mentioned previously, it was mandated by the Florida Board of Regents and the legislature and I followed the mandate.

Having been in the South Florida area for many years and having seen the changes in the area of health which have occurred and which, by the way, these changes are very similar throughout the United States, I have come to the following conclusions, as they relate to what I know personally and professionally and what has happened to the various cohorts of students and graduates of the nine programs I started at Florida International University twenty five years ago. In other words, this is the way we began Allied Health Education in South Florida.

The cohort of graduates of Medical Technology and Medical Records-Health Education found jobs mostly in Florida hospitals, laboratories and private industries. The numbers in these cohorts were small because we did not take many students only 25 per year. The same patterns apply to Occupational and Physical Therapy, as well as Dietetics and Nutrition graduates.

Most of the graduates in the Health Sciences track were graduate nurses, who opted to get a masters degree and go into some administrative positions in other areas and not in nursing. As you may know, it is very hard now, at least, in the United States, to find nurses who work as nurses. Managed care is presently relying more now on nurses aides and unless it is a specialized nurse, you do not find many graduate nurses by the bedside. So that leaves us with the graduate cohorts of criminal justice and social work of that era.

We found that the graduates of criminal justice now occupy jobs in federal agencies such as Drug Enforcement Administration, Customs, FBI, etc. Many of these graduates hold important positions in city, state, and national governments.

The cohort of Social Work graduates have become very effective in the areas of child care here in Florida, case-workers, administration of non-governmental

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organizations of NGOs and their impact in health and rehabilitative services in government agencies have been considerable.

A few graduates opted for the Clinical Private Practice - Licensed Clinical Social Worker route. I hear that that area of private practice, at least in the Metropolitan area of Miami, is getting a bit saturated and may future Social Work graduates will have to choose other areas of specialization.

I have given you a brief description of what we did in South Florida with the cohorts we started twenty five (25) years ago at our School of Health and Social Services at FIU.

The College of Allied Health at Nova Southeastern University was founded in 1993. Our mission is to educate and graduate competent allied health professionals who meet the service needs and health care of the public in a wide range of community and institutional practice settings. We seek to achieve this mission through innovative and interdisciplinary educational approaches and practices that emphasize the learner, our students.

While forming our new College of Allied Health, we took some time to decide which disciplines we wanted to offer in this new College of Allied Health at NOVA Southeastern University.

Review of existing programs and statistics that describe distribution of allied health professionals show that in certain fields many ethnic minorities are very small and at times absent. In the case of physical therapy we found that only 2% of the total number of physical therapy professionals were Hispanic and 6-7% were Afro-Americans. The same applies for physician assistant and occupational therapy. It is one of our goals at Nova Southeastern University to increase this distribution.

After our studies and assessments of needs were completed for South Florida we then decided to offer a bachelor's degree program of Physician Assistant, Master of Public Health Degree; we offer an entry level Master of Physical Therapy and a doctoral degree of Physical Therapy.

We also offer two programs in Occupational Therapy. They are: The Master of Occupational Therapy (M.O.T.)

an entry-level, professional degree, and the Doctor of Occupational Theraph (Dr.O.T.).

Because of the current trend towards health care reforms, and other factors affecting our nation's health care system, the demand for public health professionals is great. There is a shortage of professionals trained to address issues of public health involving health promotion/disease prevention, strategies of primary care delivery, and the provision of early, preventive care.

Philosophically our faculties share some common perspectives toward education. One is that there should be a general shift away from teaching with increasing emphasis on learning. Such philosophy puts more responsibility on teachers to make them responsive to student's needs.

Further, because of our graduate student population, we have a large proportion of adult learners in our classes. The mean age of the classes 1997 is 27-30. For these adult learners transformative learning, the process of becoming critically aware of how we feel, perceive, and understand our world and of reformulating those assumptions or presuppositions to permit a more discriminating or integrative perspective, becomes increasingly important. Students are encouraged to think clearly, communicate effectively, understand new technologies, solve problems effectively, and appreciate the contribution of activities to the enhancement of the quality of life. Lastly, the Programs foster understandings of the political issues facing our professions, and instills a proactive approach to build future leaders of the profession.

What we have done as our mission at the Health Professions Division of NOVA Southeastern University is to train primary care health practitioners in a multidisciplinary setting, with particular emphasis on increasing the availability of medical care in under served areas. In order to achieve its mission, the division has designed and implemented a unique approach to multidisciplinary health sciences education. Students are trained in concert with other health profession students in order that the various disciplines learn to work together as a team for the good of the public health.