

Tim Tracy, senior vice president and chief operating officer for Lincoln Health Network, is also an advisor to the Institute.

THINK TANKIN'

Sue Roe is a member of the Arizona Hospital and Healthcare advisory board.



As everyone knows, health care in the state of Arizona and around the nation continues to change, demanding ever more innovation, renovation and transformation. Those who can't keep up may well find themselves left behind.

To help find solutions and point our health care system to more positive, cost-efficient, and effective directions, the Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association has created the Arizona Health Care Institute. The Institute has begun looking at the way health care professionals in Arizona are educated and trained in an effort to respond to the changing health care landscape here in the Valley.

by Cynthia Scanlon

photos by Chuck Brooks

Officially started last May, the Institute and its 12-member advisory board will be embarking very shortly on a massive statewide work force redesign survey process which will analyze and evaluate health care changes that have been marketplace driven. The survey will ask questions about traditional and alternative medicine and health care delivery to help pinpoint viable solutions in an industry that changes seemingly every month.

"We seek to be a catalyst, to bring these issues to the table," says Fran Roberts, vice president, professional services, Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association. "We don't necessarily see ourselves providing the answers. We want to bring in the groups and individuals who can come up with the answers."

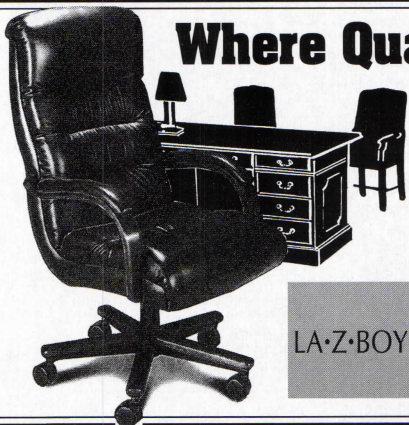
As would be expected, creating a new Institute to take a look at health care education and work force redesign takes money. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation of Washington, D.C., awarded a \$200,000 grant to the Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association Education Foundation to conduct a three-year study of nursing work force development and how that will integrate into Arizona's always-changing managed-care health care environment.

The RJW grant, which began July 1, 1996, is one of 20 granted throughout the nation and is being matched by \$200,000 in local money and \$188,000 of in-kind contributions from a consortium of 40 entities and individuals with an interest or tie to health care.

The determining factor for the grant is to begin evaluating and coordinating health education for professionals such as physicians, nursing staff, and technicians and then marrying those needs with the marketplace. Once the study has been completed, the Arizona Health Care Institute is expected to carry on its work of bringing health care professionals together to raise questions and find answers.

In May, the Institute held a "Day of Dialogue: The Response of the Physical Therapy Profession to Healthcare Reform in Arizona," a forum in which physical therapy professionals came together to discuss challenges in the field and what solutions were needed to provide direction for the industry. It was so successful, the Institute is considering having a day of dialogue for the mental health professions in January and other professions thereafter.

"The intent was to provide information, research and activities



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Fran Roberts, vice president, professional services of the Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association.



related to the health care work force," says Sue Roe, member of the Arizona Health Care's advisory board. "It's allowing us to look at work force design and needs in a very neutral capacity because the Institute's board and its mission are not servicing any one particular organization. We will have a much broader perspective."

Tim Tracy, senior vice president and COO for Lincoln Health Network, and advisor to the Institute, sees this perspective as crucial to the continued success of health care professionals in and around the state. "Within different professions, sometimes we get myopic," he says. "What the Institute is trying to do is get professionals to look beyond their own viewpoint and take a broader perspective."

Tracy adds, "We are all trying to learn how to manage more cost effectively and bring down the cost of health care, so we need to learn to work together. We can't do that if we are all in separate towers."

Roberts, who will be in charge of administering the RJW study, is also co-founder of the Maricopa Commission on Health Care Education Reform, a program designed to evaluate and reform sweeping

changes in the way health care is viewed and administered in the state.

Roberts says the commission has created five task forces on various aspects of health care and began serious work in May of this year. The Commission and Institute will work together closely.

Roberts says one of the Institute's main concerns will concentrate on the curriculum of the various health professions, which she feels is still very acute-care focused, especially on hospitals. "Health care has been reforming at breakneck speed," she says. "But when you look at educational institutions preparing workers, and at how the regulatory boards in health care operate, they look similar to how they looked in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s."

She adds, "As long as the health care professions don't see the need for change, and there is a need for change, you're going to see the marketplace correcting. If the professions aren't going to take the lead in correcting their own problems, you will see systems doing that."

The Institute is also concerned about the growing, chronic needs of Arizonans, according to Roberts. She estimates that six out of every 10 Arizonans has some kind of chronic care need, and the health care systems are ignoring those needs, with possibly perilous consequences. "As long as we ignore both the graying of America and the chronic (problems) of the population, and both of those things are still not being addressed well by the professions, we're getting ready to march off of a very high cliff." ►

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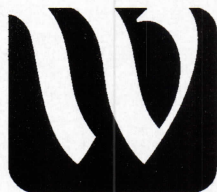
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She blames this inattention on a desire to hold larger "systems" responsible, while failing to address what can be done on a smaller, more professional level. "We always hold systems responsible for the care, and the professions kind of hang back," says Roberts. "But we all must step up to the plate." The Arizona Health Care Institute, she hopes, will allow those professions the opportunity to see the needs and then give everyone a chance at bat.

According to Roe, the Institute will also be focusing on health care forecasting for the future. "There isn't any one place where we have been forecasting what the work force needs are," she says. "For instance, if we need

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nurses, how many? And what kind of educational preparation should they have?" These are just a few of the many questions the Institute wants to take on and find answers to.

While change is never easy, especially when it comes to educational perspectives and changing old ways of doing things, Lincoln's Tracy points out, "We are not here to resist change. We are here to monitor change and assist people in making sustainable and quality changes." Time will tell if health care professionals can meet the challenge.

AB

Cynthia Scanlon is a Tempe free-lance writer.