

Building Effective Educational Alliances to Deliver High Quality Learning

The University of Chicago Hospitals (UCH) is one of the nation's premier patient care, research, and educational hospital centers. Scientists and physicians at the University have made fundamental contributions to medical science, including the first use of hormone therapy for cancer, the development of the field of sleep research, and the first living donor liver transplant. Located on the University's campus in Chicago, UCH, which includes three hospitals and the Center for Advanced Medicine. The hospital employs 4,300 people. It is routinely selected as one of the 15 best hospitals in the United States by U.S. News & World Report in its annual survey of America's nearly 7,000 hospitals.

Nine years ago, UCH addressed the challenges of an increasingly competitive, rapidly changing health care environment. These challenges included: improving patient care, reducing costs, building a pipeline of skilled employees in high demand occupations (particularly in nursing), responding to diverse patients and employees, and integrating new technologies into the delivery of health care. To prepare its workforce for the future, UCH developed a new strategy: build a culture of continuous learning by developing learning systems and forming effective partnerships with staff and with educational institutions. This was a significant departure from the usual practice of conducting one-time training events and mandating education primarily for regulatory compliance.

To implement this strategy, UCH decided that it was necessary to establish an infrastructure for preparing staff for new roles and responsibilities that would achieve the following goals.

- ♦ Align learning initiatives with business needs of the organization
- ♦ Develop organizational citizenship
- ♦ Support principles of lifelong learning
- ♦ Provide learning opportunities for employees at all levels

- ♦ Prepare managers for expanded roles of mentoring, coaching, and training
- ♦ Provide instructional resources for development of job-specific curricula
- ♦ Serve as a vehicle for organizational and cultural change

UCH Academy

In 1993, UCH launched the Academy as the vehicle for transforming the organization's culture through learning initiatives. This was one of the first corporate universities in the health care industry.

The Academy's learning priorities are established and reviewed by an advisory board whose members include the CEO, COO, VP for Finance, VP and Chief Human Resources Officer, VPs of major operational units, and representatives from the Board of Trustees and medical staff. The Advisory Board allocates the resources needed to support learning initiatives. The Academy is composed of 10 staff members and a Chief Learning Officer. To accomplish its goals, the Academy leverages a network of learning partners and hospital staff with the expertise to teach and mentor.

Critical to the development of a continuous learning culture within the organization is the top-level commitment to the process. At UCH, members of the Advisory Board and other senior executives help develop and review courses and also serve as faculty in the Academy. These modeling behaviors send a clear message to staff

HOSPITAL STATS

Name	The University of Chicago Hospitals
Industry	Health Care
Number of Employees	4,876
Location	Chicago, Illinois;
Product/Service	Patient care
Revenues	Not-for-profit corporation
Year Founded	1927 (as Billings Hospital)
Ownership	Private, non-profit
Web Address	www.uchospitals.edu

throughout the organization that participation in learning initiatives is encouraged and valued. According to Judy Schueler, Chief Learning Officer & Executive Director of the UCH Academy, "Our CEO is a major presence and participant in learning events and initiatives. He facilitates and participates in courses, sponsors our leadership forums, and participates in all graduations. And most important, he continually communicates the basic philosophy that if we have a true learning environment where everyone learns, this will be a better place to work."

A Learning Resource Network of Partners

The Academy assumes responsibility for the planning and implementation of the learning priorities established by the UCH Advisory Board. To implement these priorities, the Academy has developed key partnerships to create a learning resource network comprised of internal staff, local colleges/universities, community-based agencies, professional associations, health care affiliates, and suppliers. These partnerships broaden the expertise for training initiatives, increase flexibility in the delivery of "just-in-time training," and reduce the costs associated with a large in-house training and education staff.

The Academy serves as a learning resource to UCH "for achieving distinguishable service quality to our patients, visitors, and internal customers." But the mission of the Academy, as an "integrated arm of all other business units, is much broader than simply delivering training and education activities. It is to improve the overall performance of the employees." The Academy serves as a vehicle for managing organizational change. So far, the following organizational improvements have been critical in building and supporting a patient care environment.

- ◆ A comprehensive hiring and selection process using internally developed behavioral interview tools
- ◆ A new employee orientation program for building organizational affiliation and introducing hospital-wide services

- ◆ A comprehensive approach to developing leaders
- ◆ A performance appraisal process linking service standards and workplace competencies to employee performance ratings
- ◆ Opportunities for employees to earn college degrees/certificates onsite
- ◆ A broadened tuition reimbursement program that now covers part-time employees
- ◆ An employee recognition process that links individual and team performance to patient satisfaction
- ◆ New systems that quickly provide feedback from employees and patients

The Academy informs UCH staff about its education and training offerings through newsletters, meetings with supervisors, counseling sessions, departmental meetings, e-mails, and forums. In addition, there is an ongoing company-wide advertising campaign about the benefits of education and learning.

Using Learning and Development to Recruit and Retain Top Talent

The University of Chicago Hospitals strongly believe that their learning and development activities are an effective means to recruit and retain good employees. In several focus groups about retention, the Academy learned that employees who feel they are unable to perform their jobs competently are much more likely to leave. The Hospitals have found that providing training at the right time in the right amount helps employees succeed on the job and feel more confident in their abilities. This increases the likelihood that they will remain longer at UCH. Job applicants have reported that UCH's comprehensive training and education program gives UCH an edge in attracting recruits.

To support the organizational transformation, a comprehensive three-day Service Orientation Certificate program was developed. With an emphasis on service quality, the program focuses on building organizational and individual competencies for the delivery of patient-centered care.

New employees complete the program before reporting to their work units. Staff employed before 1993 had to complete it within an 18-month time frame. Both the service orientation program and a corresponding management and leadership development program focus on developing a "shared vision" of service quality and pride in individual and team performance. These are critical elements in creating a culture that values employee participation and supports the acquisition of new skills for improving organizational performance.

Designing and Delivering Learning Solutions

The UCH Academy develops and oversees a wide array of learning solutions that include customized internal training aimed at solving specific work problems, professional development courses, e-learning, and degree and certificate programs. Annual strategies, developed by department managers, staff, and the Academy, form the basis of what learning activities are required each year. Academy staff function as internal consultants. They respond to business unit requests and help the units design the best approaches and learning delivery methods to address their needs.

"We have made a conscious decision at the University of Chicago Hospitals to leverage employee education and training as a key driver for becoming an employer of choice. We firmly believe our organization's investment in employee learning directly impacts patient satisfaction and loyalty."

*Mike Riordan, President & CEO,
University of Chicago Hospitals*

To help employees work more effectively with patients and their families in conflict situations, Academy staff, unit managers, and employees produced a video of encounters with patients. This video aids discussion of opportunities to improve service and overall care. Support Services, in conjunction with Patient Transportation Unit employees, developed a new concept of a

"lift team" and taught others how to use it to reduce back injuries that result from patient lifting. This was piloted in one unit and is now being introduced in the Intensive Care Unit.

Currently, the Academy is launching a virtual university to deliver Web-based courses on regulatory compliance to achieve paperless records. Currently about 10 percent of learning activities are computer-based, and the Academy expects this to increase to about 30 percent in the next two years. But, according to Schueler, "Learning should neither be all computer-based training nor all instructor-led. It must be blended." In the Academy's leadership course on coaching, participants access online exercises and information to create a level knowledge field for the class sessions before classes begin. In-class material, such as theory and its applications, is delivered through instructor presentations, discussions, and role-playing. After classes are completed, online follow-up tools are available to reinforce knowledge retention—a way to address the post-class learning drop-off problem.

The Academy also offers professional development courses on work time that include topics such as professional writing, managing change, creating a paperless office, the hiring process, cultural differences, and time management. Managers report that these courses are very popular.

The Academy provides additional learning opportunities through fellowships, scholarships, and "gift of learning" award programs. These support individual educational plans and informal learning for such purposes as improving performance management or decision-making skills, benchmarking site visits on "best practices," as well as team learning directed at process improvements. A team, for example, may receive funding to explore new technologies to improve organizational performance, attend national forums or seminars, or serve internships that help the hospital enhance patient care.

Alliances with Educational Institutions

Through its "Partners in Education" program, the Academy has formed several partnerships with educational institutions in the Chicago area to offer convenient and customized degree and certificate programs. These programs are designed to reduce the barriers that often discourage full-time employees from pursuing advanced degrees, such as high tuition costs and the challenge of juggling work, class attendance, studying, and personal responsibilities.

The Academy selects educational partners based upon both their program offerings and their willingness to meet the life/work balance needs of staff. The educational partner must deliver the program onsite at UCH, typically one or two nights a week.

Partners collaborate with the Academy to review course syllabi to identify opportunities to customize courses by incorporating actual UCH work situations, problems, and case studies. Senior management staff of the Hospitals often facilitate courses.

The University of Chicago Hospitals' tuition reimbursement program covers up to 75 percent (up to \$2,000 per employee per year) of tuition. To ease up-front costs for degree programs, the schools will cover a portion of the up-front tuition fees. UCH then pays the remaining costs when the student successfully completes the course. In addition, some students are eligible for further support through a scholarship program, which may provide up to \$3,000 per year. All employees are entitled to two paid education days and \$200 annually; and after five years of employment, three education days and \$300.

Through its alliances with educational institutions, the following degrees and certificates are offered:

- ♦ ***Master of Science Degree in Advanced Practice Nursing*** (DePaul University)
- ♦ ***Master's Degree in Health Administration*** (Governors State University)
- ♦ ***Bachelor's Degree in Health Care Administration*** (Governor State University)
- ♦ ***Graduate Certificate in Organization Development*** (Benedictine University)
- ♦ ***Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing*** (St. Xavier University and University of Illinois at Chicago)
- ♦ ***Associate of Applied Science Degree in Nursing*** (Moraine Valley Community College)
- ♦ ***Certified Nurse Assistant Program*** (Wright College)
- ♦ ***Associate of Applied Science Degree in Accounting*** (College of DuPage)
- ♦ ***Associate of Arts Degree*** (Harold Washington College)
- ♦ ***Certificate in Billing and Coding*** (College of DuPage)
- ♦ ***Certificate in Surgical Technology*** (Malcolm X College)
- ♦ ***Certificate in Addictions Counseling*** (College of DuPage)
- ♦ ***Certificate in American Sign Language Studies*** (Columbia College of Chicago)
- ♦ ***Spanish for Healthcare Professionals*** (Spanish Studios)

Some of these educational partnerships address specific skill shortages at the hospital. For example, the certificate in medical billing and coding addresses a shortage, at the hospital and throughout the region, of certified coding professionals, who are essential for hospital billing systems and medical record-keeping. The onsite customized Surgical Technologist Certificate program, developed with Triton College, addresses another critical shortage. Students in this program are able to work at UCH almost full-time and, at the same time, get credit for class work, internships, and practicums. Ten of the 11 students who began the 18-month program completed it, and all were hired by the Hospitals. Four years later, 80 percent are still with UCH. These partnership

programs help UCH develop pools of candidates for hard-to-fill positions in critical skill areas.

Because of the acute nursing shortage around the country, recruiting and retaining top nursing talent has been designated a strategic priority. Consequently, the Hospitals have leveraged their commitment to continuing professional education by developing learning opportunities to specifically attract and retain quality nurses. For several years, the Hospitals have hosted programs with leading nursing schools to

Associate's degree in nursing through Moraine Valley Community College so qualified staff can progress towards becoming registered nurses.

UCH also provides internships and practicums for employees enrolled in programs with the educational partners. These enable employees to gain critical hands-on experience; and because they take place on the job, employees can fulfill their educational requirements without taking time off from work.

"Partners in Education is a win-win situation for employees and the University of

HOSPITAL SNAPSHOT

STRATEGY USED	PARTICIPANTS			
	Management/ Supervisors	Technical/ Professional	Frontline Workers	Part-time Workers
Tuition assistance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
On-site workshops and training	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Financial support for attending off-site classes, seminars, workshops and conferences	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Training/education on company time (on- or off-site)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Online learning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Individual Development Plans linked to performance evaluations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Career counseling				
Formal mentoring				
Job shadowing				

Chicago Hospitals," said the Academy Operations Manager. "Employees appreciate the Hospitals' support for their education. Employees gain a portable credential they can use to move laterally or upward within the organization. In turn, the Hospitals gain an employee who has invested time and effort in developing skill sets that the organization can use, and who is more strongly committed to the Hospitals and their goals."

The success of the Academy's initiatives, from its carefully conceived infrastructure and its close relation to management, to its educational ideas and

enable nurses to complete a bachelor of science degree in nursing (BSN) or a master of science degree (MSN) in advanced practice nursing onsite. These have been very popular and over 80 UCH nurses are currently participating in BSN completion programs with St. Xavier University or the University of Illinois at Chicago and an MSN program with DePaul University. In Fall 2002, UCH will begin to offer an

innovative implementation, has propelled it beyond the walls of UCH to form the Academy Connection. The Academy Connection is a division of the UCH Academy that collaborates with health care organizations across the country who are interested in developing a culture of continuous learning and service. Members of the Academy Connection share learning tools

through a Web-based knowledge management network, and hold executive summits and Chief Learning Officer forums.

Impact Assessment

The UCH Academy has dramatically increased employee participation in learning initiatives. Before the opening of the UCH Academy in January 1993, the UCH's Training and Organization Development Unit primarily supported only management development, providing services for approximately 600 course participants per year. In 1993, the Academy supported over 4,300 course enrollments, and five years later that number had increased to 32,000. An estimated 20 to 30 percent of the staff elect to participate in learning opportunities that are not mandated by the organization, which is a high average for most industries. The high level of participation is related to the quality, the varying teaching methods, convenience, encouragement by managers and, in general, the learning culture at the Hospitals.

The Academy evaluates the impact of learning by examining employee retention and patient satisfaction data. Other sources of information relative to impact include course evaluation feedback, employee surveys, focus groups, and industry benchmarks. Staff turnover from 1996 to 1999 dropped from 26 percent to 15 percent. The industry benchmark was close to 20 percent. Turnover went back up to 20 percent from 1999 to 2000, but then so did the industry benchmark for hospitals, which increased to 26 percent.

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