

Patient/Client Care Partnerships: An Industry Perspective
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Introduction

The development of partnerships between institutions of higher education and the healthcare industry on behalf of patient/client care offers unique challenges and opportunities for each member of the tripartite. Collaborative research between industry and educational institutions is becoming increasingly prevalent as a means of achieving similar outcomes, while providing a bridge between theory and practice for the student and the patient/client¹. Specifically, diagnostic and treatment components offer a unique opportunity for education, research, and services rendered to communities of interest within this purview.

Although innovative and novel, healthcare education-industry partnerships are not the exception for institutions of higher learning. Grants and research fellowships have long been sponsored projects bridging medical academics to the healthcare industry. However, the vast majority of these opportunities have been historically established primarily in medical center and health science center institutions due to the research support systems and significant scientific communities. Allied health programs located in these centers have been afforded research opportunities with outstanding benefits and outcomes. Nonetheless, allied health programs and nursing programs located in more traditional academic settings have found funding and research support for health-related research indeed more challenging. Ideally, research and grantsmanship offer an excellent avenue for education, research, and patient/client benefits as agreed between the higher education institution and the medical industry components. For higher education institutions seeking to collaborate with industry, initially, and then move toward a research agenda, another approach may be proffered as an alternative method to establishing this partnership.

From an inductive perspective, please permit the latitude of presenting an example of the development of the Texas State Sleep Center at Texas State University-San Marcos and an outline of general principles learned from our experiences that may offer a helpful approach in the development of a patient/client partnership between industry and higher education programs.

An Institutional Exemplar

In 2002, the faculty of the Department of Respiratory Care of the College of Health Professions at Texas State became aware of the increasing interest of the respiratory care national association in polysomnography and the significant manpower provided by respiratory therapists to the world of sleep medicine. With over 50% of all sleep professionals in the country being concurrently credentialed in respiratory care, the national professional association began to look closely at standards and practices in polysomnography. The accrediting agency for respiratory care programs also revised

accreditation guidelines to include the mandatory inclusion of polysomnography as required component of the respiratory care curriculum.

As the Respiratory Care (RC) faculty considered these specific curricular changes, the administration at Texas State began encouraging all unit chairs and directors to search for alternative means of generating external income to support capital equipment and curriculum initiatives. Due to the relocation of the Texas State Student Health Center out of the Health Professions Building in 2002, space adjoining the RC Clinic became available. With building renovation two years away, I approached the Dean and the Vice-President for Facilities with a concept plan to create a two-bedroom, two-bath sleep center with a reception area and sleep tech control room. Because the sleep center had been included in the department's strategic plan for the university, the administration granted concept approval for development the space; however, before making the commitment to remodel the space, I was asked to demonstrate equipment funding support for the area.

Without a funding source for equipment or furnishing, I contacted the college development officers and worked closely with them to request gifts-in-kind support for the development of the center. A list of sleep diagnostic industrial representative was developed for each manufacturing company of the sleep diagnostic equipment needed for the center. Making all the contacts personally, I explained the mission of the sleep center as educational, research, and patient/client diagnostic service-oriented. I ended each contact with the question, "Would you be willing to make a gift-in-kind contribution to the development of this sleep center?"

After receiving the first gift of a \$63,000 sleep diagnostic system from one company, I contacted the development officers to assist me in completing the gift and provided the company with the appropriate tax credit for their valuable contribution. The university administration was inform of the gift needed to make the sleep center operational and clearance to proceed with the demolition and remodeling of the space for the sleep center was obtained. Working closely with a university architect, the 1,000 square foot space was remodeled for \$17/square foot.

In the same manner, a specialty bedding company was contacted and they provided us with an \$8,000 gift-in-kind for the two sleep beds. Finally, a Texas State alumnus was contacted who as president of a large furniture store and upon hearing about the mission of the sleep lab and the other two contributions, he gladly agreed to provide the sleep center with bedroom furnishings and reception area furnishings. The total gift-in-kind received was \$78,000 with remodeling costs of \$17,000 for a total cost of \$95,000.

Since opening its doors in 2005, the Texas State Sleep Center has become accredited by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine and is operational six nights each week and on Saturday morning. Students from the BSRC Respiratory Care Program and the Polysomnography Course of Studies rotate through the sleep center for clinical experiences and to participate in research. Within two years and after building a physician referral-base in the rural community, the center began generating funds that permitted the purchase of capital equipment items for students and faculty that would not have been possible otherwise. Faculty and students have also benefited through financial support of research and conference attendance for paper presentations.\

As partnerships are forged between interested entities, individual goals and outcomes may present conflicting perspectives with major challenges for successful collaboration. The partnerships formed through the creation of the sleep center have resulted in strong support for faculty and students in education and research while providing patient/client diagnostics support. The Texas State Sleep Center has embraced community education in the area of sleep disorders and provides area physicians with an excellent, accredited resource for diagnostics and treatment of patients with sleep disturbances. The sleep center both faculty and staff in need of sleep diagnostics and treatment.

The generous donors have been pleased with the establishment of the sleep center and the value of their role in providing an outstanding opportunity for education, research and patient/client diagnostics services. In turn, the industrial entities have been pleased with the training/clinical experience “bias” that may have occurred when students utilized their products in the operation of the sleep center and in research.

Principles for Developing Partnerships with Industry

Although the methodology and sequence may vary, the basic steps for developing partnerships with industry follow a logical progression:

- 1. Develop the concept for the project and give attention to institutional strategic plans.** Utilize every opportunity to reinforce a stated goal of the institution, college, or unit. Describe the ideal project outcome in terms of benefits for the educational institutions, students, industry, and patient/clients. Identify all project equipment needs and requirements for the ideal outcome.
- 2. Solicit the support of administration at the concept-level.** This critical step determines whether the project may proceed in a timely manner or wait for another opportunity to move forward.
- 3. Develop a mission/vision statement clearly articulating the expected outcome of the project and the perceived benefits to all communities of interest.** Talking points relating to benefits for each partner are best anticipated and noted prior to contact. Revision and expansion of the mission/vision statement may be needed following conversations at each level of approval. Be flexible with the vision and allow input to expand the vision.
- 4. Contact industry utilizing the mission/vision statement while describing the specific benefits.** The medical industry is well acquainted with the “investment of education” for repeat sales in the future, as program graduates become managers and administrators. Make sure the industry representative is forward thinking as you address present and future benefits for a gift.
- 5. Describe how you plan to acknowledge the gift-in-kind in a practical manner.** Gifts can be acknowledged through special recognition in a number of ways. Be prepared to provide the industry with examples you may have in mind for their recognition.
- 6. Once a gift is pledged, personally follow through with development officers to insure proper processing and receiving of the gift.** Make sure

that you provide a personal point-of-contact for the process and follow up regularly until the gift is completed.

- 7. As the project is completed, provide the appropriate PR through various forms of media, open-house events, and physical displays of gift acknowledgment.** The expressions of gratefulness to our donors are without question one of the most important aspects of gift completion.
- 8. Once operational, provide periodic reports to industry donors and involve them at all levels possible with projects, research, and acknowledgments.** Provide updates on student learning, research realized, grants submitted, community impact, and institutional acknowledgment.

Partnerships between educational institutions with a patient/client focus and industry represent long-term relationships. As with many personal relationships, casual connectivity can progress into meaningful, deep and integrated relationships. In much the same way, as Allied Health providers we are positioned to bring together the patient/client, students, professions, higher education, industry and healthcare to provide a partnership that is vital and beneficial to all.

Reference

1. Gaskill D, Morrison P, Sanders F, Forster E, Edwards H, Fleming R, McClure S. University and Industry Partnerships: Lessons From Collaborative Research. *International Journal of Nursing Practice*. 2003; 9: 347-355.