

Wright State University graduates inaugural class of physician leaders

The Boonshoft Physician Leadership Development Program offering dual degrees in either M.D./M.P.H. or M.D./M.B.A. is unique in the nation

By: Nancy Harker

After five years of studying for dual degrees, medical students enrolled in the inaugural class of the Boonshoft Physician Leadership Development Program at WSU's Boonshoft School of Medicine are graduating this year with two degrees, prepared to become leaders in our ever-changing health care system as they enter their medical residencies.

Philanthropist Oscar Boonshoft saw the need to provide formal training to medical students to deal with the growing challenges and complexities in healthcare systems. His vision resonated with that of Richard J. Schuster, M.D., M.M.M., F.A.C.P., associate professor of community health and internal medicine and longtime medical educator. The program was launched in 2004 thanks to Mr. Boonshoft's generosity, and has achieved national recognition less than four years after its creation.

The curriculum trains medical students early on to understand how health systems work in order to become the health care leaders of tomorrow. "Our theory is that if a separate leadership curriculum is integrated with business management or public health education at an early stage of clinical education, then graduates, organizations, and communities may benefit sooner and experience a more positive impact from the effort," said Schuster, who is Boonshoft Chair and Director of the Center for Global Health Systems Management and Policy.

The graduating students receive an M.B.A. from the WSU Raj Soin College of Business or an M.P.H from Wright State University in addition to the M.D. degree from the Boonshoft School of Medicine.

The program features an integrated curriculum that runs concurrently throughout the five years and includes a multi-year series of evening seminars that emphasize leadership development. Medical students pursuing the M.P.H. are combined with the medical students pursuing the M.B.A. for these development seminars.

Program developers include its director, James R. Ebert, M.D., M.B.A., F.A.A.P., associate professor in the Departments of Community Health and Pediatrics; Gerald E. Crites, M.D., M.Ed., associate professor, Department of Internal Medicine; and Dr. Schuster.

Developed through research, literature review, and competency model development and invention, the leadership program is based on seven competencies including:

- **Communication:** Effectively sending and receiving information to individuals, organizations, and communities.
- **Awareness:** Developing and maintaining an understanding of relevant belief and value systems impacting decisions in organizations.
- **Building relationships:** Effectively building and maintaining relationships with individuals, organizations, and communities.
- **Ethos:** Developing and integrating positive leadership traits.
- **Analytical thinking:** Effectively using quantitative and qualitative analytical skills to clarify complex team, organizational and system problems.
- **Forward thinking:** Solving team, organizational, and system problems by selecting and using appropriate thinking tools.
- **Initiative and change:** Anticipating when organizational/team change is needed and effectively choosing strategies to facilitate change.

This program is unique in the United States because the students do not take a year off from their medical studies to work on a M.P.H. or M.B.A. degree. Instead the program integrates the needed courses throughout the five-year tracks, providing continuity in medical training along with the leadership, business, or public health courses needed to complete the dual degrees.

There are now more than 30 students in the leadership course, with more than a dozen applicants for this fall's entering class.

“It is our goal to help our students develop in the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that physician leaders need and use successfully in their careers, and also to increase the supply of well-educated physicians leaders to the health care system,” said Dr. Ebert. “This program does that and more.”