

Trends in the Organization and Management of Academic Health Centers Summary Outline

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It has never been more important for academic health centers around the world to work together to address pressing needs in public health, patient care, health professions education, and biomedical and clinical research.

An academic health center is defined as an accredited, degree-granting institution of higher education that consists of:

- A medical school (allopathic or osteopathic)
- One of more other health professions schools or programs (allied health, dentistry, graduate studies, nursing, pharmacy, public health, veterinary medicine), and
- An owned or affiliated relationship with a teaching hospital, health system or other organized health care provider.

The Association of Academic Health Centers therefore differs from many other associations in that it is not represent a specific discipline. Rather, the association represents *all* the components of the academic health center, including the health professions schools and their associated academic, clinical, and administrative infrastructure.

The major forces driving change in academic health centers:

- Science and technology
- Emerging/new diseases and health issues
- Demographic, socio-cultural and political trends
- Economics, and
- Globalization
 - Globalization in the health field is characterized by competition for patients (“medical tourism”), talented researchers and faculty, and all kinds of health care workers. Despite this, globalization can be a highly positive phenomenon if academic health centers can figure out how to work together.

Taken together, these forces driving change have contributed to a remodeling of the academic health center enterprise from an “ivory tower” to a complex business enterprise. As a result, academic health care centers find themselves with a series of challenges that are changing fundamentally the ways in which they operate.¹ Some responses to these challenges have been:

- Reorganization along non-disciplinary lines
- Becoming more businesslike in operations
- Markedly increased efforts to relate to key stakeholders (the public, patients, practitioners, politicians, policymakers, and the business community)
- Combining research - both basic and applied - with implementation and improvement (closing the gap between knowledge and practice is perceived as increasingly important), and
- Taking a more globally- minded view.

It is also likely that the range of types of academic health centers will become more diverse in the future than they are today, requiring institutions to develop new strategic plans into order to make the hard decisions about resource allocation.

Viewed from this broad perspective, many academic health centers are moving towards attaining a “virtuous cycle,” in which all of the academic missions - education, research and patient care – are viewed not only as supporting each other, but as each making the others better.²

- Or to put it another way, “what is good for one is good for all.”
- Or, again, that “research and clinical success are synergistic and interdependent.”

In practical terms, this means that academic health center leaders are looking to create an enterprise in which all the components work together, rather than compete with one another. Features include:

- A leadership structure that moves out of traditional discipline-specific silos to span conceptually and operationally the entire enterprise
- More of a focus on team building and effective execution
- Working towards more “interprofessional” education programs, meaning the teaching of subjects and topics across specialties, disciplines, and even professions, with the goal of delivering more timely, relevant, and cost-effective education
- A new recognition of the importance of leadership
- And finally, in this era of globalization, looking to develop worldwide linkages and programs for all mission areas, as exemplified by a new organization we are creating: AAHC International™.

¹ taken in part from the Milbank International Campaign to Revitalize Academic Medicine

² Wartman SA. Toward a *virtuous cycle*: The changing face of academic health centers. *Acad Med* 2008;83:797-799.

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AAHC International™ envisions a critical junction of need and opportunity for academic health centers to work in partnership worldwide and, in so doing, be among the critical forces shaping the 21st century.

- Through working together, academic health centers can become agents of change that embody the ideals of enhancing health and well-being worldwide.
- By serving to mobilize and speak on behalf of their enormous collective strengths and resources, AAHC International™ can help ensure that these institutions have a voice in international matters affecting health, research and the economy.
- As an organized group, academic health centers can address pressing needs in public health, patient care, health professions education, and biomedical and clinical research.
- In addition, AAHC International™ can work with institutions to develop the organizational and management expertise that captures the power of the combined missions of the academic health center.

AAHC International™ is driven by the vision of a global organization that mobilizes and speaks on behalf of academic health centers to foster the concept of an international academic health center community driven by the ideal of improving the public good.