Jefferson Medical College and Widener University Join their Cohorts at the Fourth Annual North American MD/MBA Conference

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The Fourth Annual North American MD/MBA Conference for program directors, faculty, students, and alumni took place June 23-25, 2006 in Hanover, NH. The conference was sponsored by Dartmouth Medical School, Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth, and the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. In keeping with the format of the previous three conferences, including the one hosted by the Department of Health Policy at Jefferson Medical College (JMC) in 2004, the agenda began with a status report from Dr. Maria Young Chandler, MD, MBA, Faculty Advisor for the School of Medicine and the Paul Merage School of Business at the University of California – Irvine.

Dr. Chandler reported that in 2006, 54 of the 125 schools of medicine are partners with schools of business in offering the MD and MBA degrees. When JMC and Widener University admitted their first MD/MBA students in 1993, there were fewer than 10 medical schools with MD/MBA programs. These dual-degree programs represent a response to the need for physicians in leadership positions through the healthcare system, in both the public and private sectors.

With the rapid growth of these dual-degree programs, in 2004, several MD/MBA students developed the National Association for MD/MBA Students (www.md-mba.org). An on-line survey administered through the association's web site asked current MD/MBA students why they chose the dual-degree program. Respondents listed the following as their prime motivators: opportunity to serve in a leadership position; job security; expected changes in medicine; opportunity to combine clinical and administrative roles; potential for innovation; and desire to "make a difference." Current students attending the conference reported that the believed they have a broader vision of the healthcare system their cohorts who did not choose to do an MBA. Some of the physician attendees who completed their MBAs after finishing their medical training said they wished they had the business administration perspective while they were in medical school.

An Inspiring Keynote Address

The conference included a number of speakers and panelists, most of whom are MD/MBAs. Dr. C. Everett Koop, former Surgeon General, and a Senior Scholar at the Koop Institute at Dartmouth, introduced the keynote speaker, Regina Benjamin, MD, MBA, Founder and CEO of La Batre Rural Health Clinic in Bayou Le Batre, Alabama.

In her address, “Making a Difference,” Dr. Benjamin described how the skills she developed in her MBA program made it possible for her to not only establish a clinic that serves a disadvantaged population, but to keep it running through two devastating hurricanes, including Hurricane Katrina. “The MBA opened up a whole new world to me. It helped me understand public policy and business issues. The MD/MBA allows you to choose your own path,” she said.

Panel Provides Insights

An industry panel of MD/MBAs provided insight into the multiple career opportunities for dual-degree students. The panelists work in academic medicine, community medicine, pharmaceuticals, insurance, and consulting. The panelists advised dual-degree students to complete residency training, maintain a clinical practice, and find good mentors, regardless of what sector of the healthcare industry they want to pursue.

Peter Mazonson, MD, MBA of Mosaic Consulting in California believes the dual-degree creates more opportunities for innovation and creativity. William Weeks, MD, MBA, Associate Professor at Dartmouth Medical School, wanted to influence more people through policy and health services research, and used his MBA background to accomplish that goal. Amrit Ray, MD, MBA, Worldwide Medical Team Leader at Pfizer Global Pharmaceuticals in New York argued there are more opportunities now than ever for dual-degree graduates to pursue a tremendous variety of careers.

Ten years ago there were a limited number of MD/MBAs, and those few had to be trail blazers. Today the possibilities seem endless.