

# Where will the next generation of health leadership come from?



Author: *Cindy Ehnes, Esq., Executive Vice President*

I have been asked why, as a regulatory law attorney, I have taken a detour from that career to provide executive leadership for the Health Scholars Talent Development Services division of COPE Health Solutions. I joined COPE Health Solutions to address the time-worn question, “*Where will the next generation of health leadership come from?*” How will the best young people from less-advantaged communities of color rise to the top without connections, mentoring and a clear path forward?

The *Health Scholars* courses provide thousands of individuals each year with experiences that focus and mold a passion for patient-centered, team-based care and which uniquely position them to access exciting healthcare careers. Students learn side-by-side with clinical professionals in the inpatient and ambulatory care settings to provide exceptional patient care. Currently, more than 4,000 students participate each year at 20 different hospitals or health systems, while also getting 8-units through the University of California – Riverside Extension College. There are more than 25,000 alumni over our 15 years of operation.

My interest in leading this program grew from my early experiences. I was one of those young people without a clear path or direction. Although we were not technically poor, with nine people in the family, financial struggle and crisis was our norm. Of my five brothers and one sister, only one other finished college. There was no guidance on how one goes to the right school; pays for school and connects to the opportunities and contacts to create that glide path to a profession. I liken it to being a pinball bouncing off random opportunities, with no clear soft or safe landing. And so it matters deeply to me that every young person touched by our partner health systems is given the chance to participate, to learn from health care professionals and to be mentored into the right educational and vocational opportunities.

Those of us who work on the Health Scholars programs -- whether on staff at COPE Health Solutions, at our partner health systems or who serve on one of our Leadership teams at each of the sites -- know that we have been given an unprecedented opportunity to put actions behind the many words lamenting the gap between the identified workforce needs and talent recruitment, particularly culturally diverse workers.

The difficulty many health workforce initiatives face is the inability to achieve large-scale ‘boots on the ground’ operations that prove their concept, replicability and sustainability over time. There are mentoring opportunities, such as the American College of Health Care Executive’s emphasis on minority advancement; however, there are few formal programs like Health Scholars that for 365 days each year place thousands of promising young people directly on the hospital units and in clinics to work side-by-side with care providers.



The Health Scholars division consists of a turn-key set of programs that help health systems home-grow their workforces from within their communities. *Health Care Scholars* is a program for college-age students and veterans, *Junior Health Scholars* for high-school age students and *Care Navigator Scholars* for those who wish to learn skills in patient navigation. Additionally, the New Grads program for R.Ns assists recent graduates to gain critical experience in difficult job markets. The experiences help to shape best-fit candidates for hire, and foster long-term loyalties with the organization as program participants progress through their careers. Many will seek to begin their careers with the health system or choose to return to work at their host facilities as experienced health care professionals. Further, COPE Connect is an alumni community of more than 25,000 health professionals and pre-health professionals who support a culture of continual learning and professional development of health care leaders.

In 2012, COPE Health Solutions launched Global Health Experiences (GHE), a comprehensive suite of services providing international students and professionals with unparalleled educational experiences, interaction and engagement with U.S. patients and health care professionals. Participants gain an understanding of the cultural influences affecting patient care in the U.S., preparing them to become well-versed global practitioners with a diversified knowledge of healthcare. Since its inception, COPE Health Solutions has provided these experiences to over 450 international students.

Health Scholars programs can be implemented in any care setting that offers opportunities for ‘hands-on’ patient and member care opportunities and clear, structured experiential pathways to gain clinical competencies. Standardization of core operational elements, sharing of best practices and outstanding student training provides the predictably excellent operating platform for launching the Health Scholars programs at new sites, while assuring that each new program is adapted to reflect the culture and institutional norms of the partner health system.

Our scholars are integral members of the healing team in any inpatient or ambulatory care setting in which they work. By viewing each patient care opportunity as a healing encounter, students impact patient safety and the member experience with the health plan or system. Students benefit from personalized experiences to be mentored by clinical staff and to create life-long learning and networking opportunities as they move into their professions.

In conclusion, instead of wishing the Health Care Scholars program had been around for me those many years ago, I and our incredibly talented and committed COPE Health Solutions staff and system partners, work to ensure that our new generation of health leaders enjoys rich opportunities to find and pursue their passions.

How will your health system find those passionate, skilled staff members that fit the culture of the organization? COPE Health Solutions can partner with you to implement a Health Scholars or other workforce development program to showcase your system to the young talent in your community, and to provide invaluable patient care support to your team. Please go to our website to learn more or give me a call directly at 213-259-0245.

