Challenges and Opportunities Facing Medical Education

Peter Densen, MD states in “Challenges and Opportunities Facing Medical Education” that “medical education is at a crossroads” as it faces the internal and external challenges that will need to be addressed as we move from our current educational systems to those of 2020 and beyond. Dr. Densen’s basic point is that healthcare education, today, faces growing pressure to change things as basic as “how they view their educational mission.” To this end, the Association of American Medical Colleges, the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, the Carnegie Foundation, and the Lancet Commissions have each addressed what they see as challenges to the future of healthcare education. These challenges include:

1. Discontent with current healthcare education delivery methods,
2. The impact of healthcare reform on educational practices,
3. The need to keep pace with continually changing educational technologies, and
4. The need for healthcare education to recognize and address the ever-growing specialization within the field of medical practice.

What may also be added to Dr. Densen’s list is the growing push for internationalization, the changing nature of the students entering healthcare education at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and the challenges facing healthcare educators.

It is not enough to be confident that we are currently providing high-quality healthcare education. We must be confident that we are continually positioning and repositioning ourselves so that we will be able to provide the highest levels of healthcare education in the future. Such a commitment means that we must continually be open to addressing the changing nature of our health delivery system by changing not only what we teach but how we teach.

It is clear that today’s students not only expect but may have come to need an educational environment that is both flexible and continuous while simultaneously maintaining the high standards that will provide them with the skills that they will need to be successful. To meet these challenges, our healthcare providers will need to continue to address the ever-changing needs of:

- On-line Education
- Simulator Education Practices
- Completion Degrees
- Cross-Training
- Credit for Prior Learning and
- Credit Articulation

In short, no matter how good we currently are, if we don’t keep pace with a quickly-changing profession, we will find ourselves slipping behind our peers.