

TRENDS IN HEALTH OCCUPATIONS EDUCATION

When looking, simultaneously, at health service needs and human resources to provide health workers, it becomes evident there is potential for, and merit in, a more effective correlation of human resources with employment opportunities. A much better utilization of all levels of human resources can be accomplished through suitable and adequate preparation of health service workers. It is imperative that this preparation be provided in quality educational programs administered or supported by an agency firmly committed to the educational role.

1. The Economics of Education—Current studies have been initiated to compare the social, governmental and individual investment in education with the return on this investment to society and the individual. As educational programs at all levels seek a progressively larger share of the available public resources, there are many searching questions pertaining to priorities for which public education funds will be allocated. To date, very few cost analysis studies have been attempted which would identify the most beneficial or economic utilization of public education funds in view of personnel prepared. Based on principles established in other areas and studies in this field, indications are that a larger, more comprehensive program will prove to be by far the most efficient structure.

2. The Changing Structure and Role of Public Education—There have been dramatic changes in the demands on the public education system in recent years. Society expects this system to provide appropriate educational programs for people of all ages, levels of ability, and interests. A significant shift in organizational structure and a marked expansion in type of educational programs are well underway in an attempt to fulfill this expectation.

Public colleges and universities have long provided the occupational preparation for the health professions at the baccalaureate and higher degree levels. A similar obligation, to provide preparation at less than professional level for the great majority of our young people and adults who will not complete a college degree, is being recognized in the emerging role of public education. This emerging role prompted the need for larger population and financial bases to provide an adequate student flow. The result has been a significant organizational change, the establishment of educational programs on an area or regional base.

A major role of this comprehensive community college or area vocational-technical college is to provide educational programs which are occupationally oriented. A number of these are preparatory programs offered parallel to the first year or two of college; others, usually of shorter duration, are for retraining and/or upgrading.

3. The Shift in Orientation for Health Occupations Education—The trend to shift Health Occupations Education programs from service institutions (hospital, clinic, or other health agency) to an area or regional educational institution is compatible with the role of the comprehensive community college or area vocational-technical college.

Simultaneously, a basic change in philosophy is taking place. This philosophy embraces the principle of charging educational costs to educational institutions supported by the public tax base. Traditionally, programs to prepare health occupations personnel emerged in service institutions with a subordinate role in education. The costs of such programs have necessarily been included as service charges and therefore borne by patients. Many programs operated by service institutions have been discontinued due to financial stress. Also, the mobility of our present work force precludes the retention of those trained in a particular service institution long enough for them to return services commensurate with the investment made. Shifting the cost to a broad educational base seems appropriate and more compatible with this increased mobility of our labor force.

There are additional advantages to support this shift of Health Occupations Education to community colleges or area vocational-technical colleges. Because of the size and numbers of inter-related programs, the proportionate overhead and administrative costs will not only be decreased but they will be borne by education. The potentially larger pool of recruits, with proper guidance, will provide a steady flow of appropriate applicants. The socially accepted objective of "going to college" can be realized and status derived from attending this type of institution, rather than a service-oriented institution, will likely enhance enrollments.