

---

*Diane Poole; Randy Collier; Nettie Evans, RN, MSN; Janice Faulkner; Michael Priddy, PhD; and Janet Knox*

---

In 2001 the University Health Systems of Eastern Carolina and its flagship 745-bed tertiary care center, Pitt County Memorial Hospital, were experiencing workforce shortages resulting in closed beds and subsequent service delays. Projections of a forthcoming health care workforce crisis propelled the health system to develop new strategies to address this issue. Workforce development became an organizational priority to assure that the 1.2 million citizens in its catchment area could have timely access to its tertiary care services.

A partnership was established that included University Health Systems of Eastern Carolina, East Carolina University and Brody School of Medicine, Pitt Community College, Eastern Area Health Education Center, Greenville-Pitt Chamber of Commerce, and Pitt County Schools. The partners shared a common belief that low student academic achievement was one of the largest barriers to resolving the health workforce shortage in eastern North Carolina. They agreed that investing in local students who desired to live and make a difference in the region could serve to promote economic development through increased opportunities for stable, good paying jobs while concurrently addressing the University Health Systems' workforce demands.

To respond to the needs and to take advantage of the resources available to the system, the Pitt County Health Sciences Academy was developed. With financial support from The Duke Endowment and the creative and committed leadership of this unique partnership, the Academy opened its virtual door to high school freshmen in the fall of 2003 and evolved as a broad-based, far-reaching strategy to create systemic change by improving students' academic strengths in math, science, and reading comprehension. The Academy is a high school enhanced curriculum, a school-within-a-school model, that provides 4-year health career pathways (academic and

health sciences elective courses) for students pursuing health care-related careers after graduation. The Academy partners with Pitt Community College and East Carolina University's Brody School of Medicine to provide academic opportunities beyond the standard high school curriculum. Its goal was to produce students with increased academic knowledge and skills combined with an awareness of health career options. Emphasis was placed on the math, science, technology, reading, and critical thinking skills required for successful admission and completion of rigorous college or university health sciences coursework.

The first 4-year class of 51 students graduated in May 2007, and a total of 110 students have graduated since 2005. Thirty former high school participants have already entered the part-time workforce of Pitt County Memorial Hospital while pursuing health careers in colleges and universities. The program conducted 1- and 2-year follow-up studies of the graduates and found that 93% are pursuing health-related occupations.

The program has learned along the way that it can be more intensive and key modifications made to Pitt County Health Sciences Academy since its inception include opening its enhanced curriculum to all students, realigning its cohort to meet accountability standards, implementing an early college track, and enhancing early employment options such as internships and pharmacy technician certifications. In the future it plans to expand the early college option, consolidate the academy into a single facility, and explore aligning it with a regional math and science high school.

The partnership recognizes that the success of this endeavor can be expanded and continued. The program looks forward to continuing its task of expanding the academic achievement and interest in health careers of regional students.

---

**Diane Poole** is executive vice president, Pitt County Memorial Hospital.

**Randy Collier** is retired Pitt County Health Sciences Academy director.

**Nettie Evans, RN, MSN**, is vice president, Patient Care Services, Roanoke Chowan Hospital, University Health Systems and former director, Health Careers, Pitt County Memorial Hospital.

**Janice Faulkner** is a community volunteer, former North Carolina Secretary of State.

**Michael Priddy, EdD**, is former superintendent, Pitt County Schools.

**Janet Knox** is current administrator, Pitt County Health Sciences Academy. Ms Knox can be reached at [jknox \(at\) pitt.k12.nc.us](mailto:jknox@pitt.k12.nc.us) or 1717 West Fifth Street, Greenville, NC 27834.