

The College of Human Ecology's Sloan Program in Health Administration educates leaders for an industry as complex as it is idiosyncratic.

Sloan Program Cultivates Leaders in Health Care

BY CAROLE STONE

Why do students choose the Sloan Program in Health Administration? "They think of health care as a meaningful way to make a living," says Will White, director of the Sloan Program and professor of Policy Analysis and Management. "Health care is certainly not the highest paying industry. The students who choose it are drawn to an industry that takes care of people and makes a difference."

Students in this two-year professional degree program learn administrative skills; familiarity with the organization of the health care system and public policy issues; the tools of public health; the finesse to work with doctors, nurses, and others; and, sometimes, the entrepreneurial wherewithal to innovate and improve the performance of the current health care system.

"Promoting quality, access, efficiency, and innovation in every aspect of health care delivery and financing is the overall goal of the program," says Brooke Hollis, executive director of the program and a 1978 Sloan graduate. "Almost 50 percent of Sloan Program graduates work for organizations that deliver health care, notably but not exclusively hospitals," he says. "The rest are spread over many different categories both domestically and internationally."

The Sloan Program's Master of Health Administration degree (M.H.A.) is a specialized management degree that focuses on the health industry but is broad enough to allow students to follow a variety of career paths. The program's core courses include health care organization, accounting, marketing,

leadership, financial management, and ethics, and such subjects as epidemiology and regression analysis and managerial forecasting.

Sloan Program alumni work in a wide range of health-related careers, including hospitals and health networks, management consulting, long-term care, ambulatory services, pharmaceuticals, insurance/finance, government, academia, and professional organizations.

A few examples of Sloan Program graduates include:

Nancy Schlichting, a 1979 graduate and recently named to *Modern Health Care's* 100 Most Powerful People in Health Care, is chief executive officer of the Henry Ford Health System, which ranks among the nation's top integrated health systems. "My Cornell education has served me very well during my entire health care career," Schlichting says. "I learned the fundamentals of leadership and the importance of public policy."

Amit Mody, M.D., a 1994 graduate, is EVP/chief operating officer of St. Francis Hospital and Medical Center in Hartford, Conn., which holds the unusual distinction of being a "Top 100 Hospital" in three different categories. "The Sloan Program gave me a solid foundation in hospital management principles and it taught me how, when, and of whom to ask pertinent critical questions," Mody says. "It also provided an alumni network for entry into the market during the early part of my career, people to call to help solve problems along the way, and now, for recruitment to build future teams."

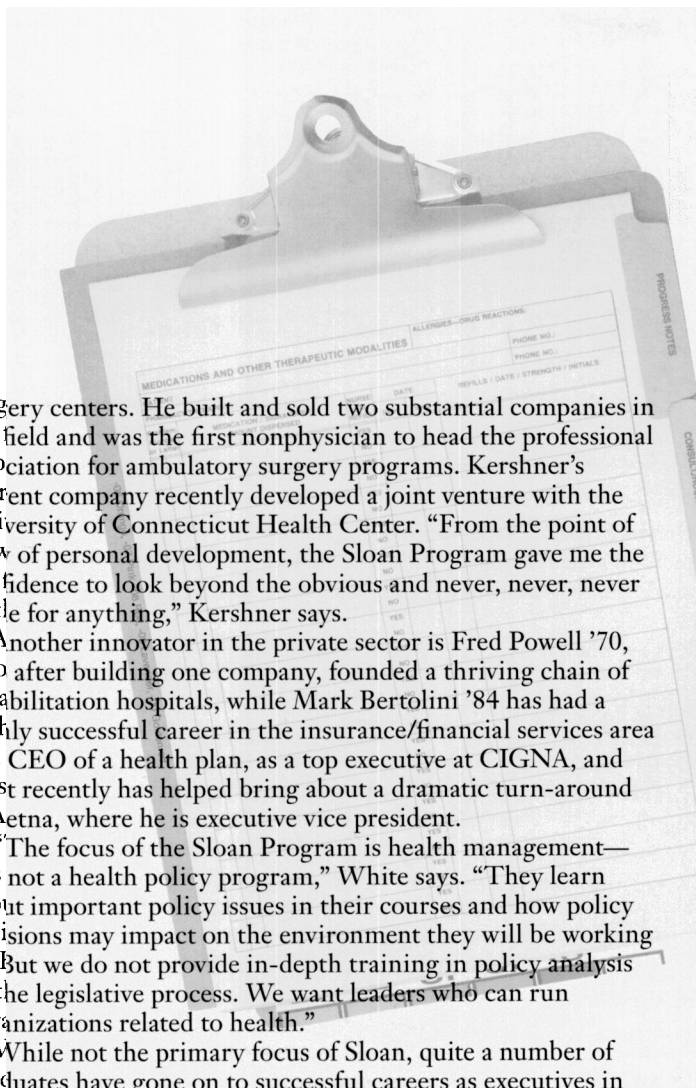
Dan Hoffmann, a 1979 graduate and former secretary of health for Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge (and the first nonphysician to be appointed to that position), heads a large region for the Veterans Administration Health System. "My study of management principles at Sloan has served me well in guiding the operations of eight hospitals and 10 outpatient facilities as director of the VA Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network," Hoffmann says. "Our service area covers some 8,500 square miles across Virginia, North Carolina, and West Virginia. Our focus here on measurable performance indicators provides me with the data needed to manage our array of resources in a manner that results in 'gold standard' health care for the veterans we so proudly serve."

Alumni entrepreneurs include Bernie Kershner '64, who was a pioneer in the development of freestanding ambulatory

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surgery centers. He built and sold two substantial companies in the field and was the first nonphysician to head the professional association for ambulatory surgery programs. Kershner's current company recently developed a joint venture with the University of Connecticut Health Center. "From the point of view of personal development, the Sloan Program gave me the confidence to look beyond the obvious and never, never, never settle for anything," Kershner says.

Another innovator in the private sector is Fred Powell '70, who after building one company, founded a thriving chain of rehabilitation hospitals, while Mark Bertolini '84 has had a highly successful career in the insurance/financial services area as a CEO of a health plan, as a top executive at CIGNA, and most recently has helped bring about a dramatic turn-around at Aetna, where he is executive vice president.

"The focus of the Sloan Program is health management—it is not a health policy program," White says. "They learn about important policy issues in their courses and how policy decisions may impact on the environment they will be working in. But we do not provide in-depth training in policy analysis or the legislative process. We want leaders who can run organizations related to health."

While not the primary focus of Sloan, quite a number of graduates have gone on to successful careers as executives in the policy area. For example, Spencer Johnson '71, who is now CEO of Michigan Health and Hospital Association, was a former associate director of domestic policy at the White House. Another example of a graduate whose career has included activities in both the private and public sectors is John Norris '73, a joint Sloan/Law graduate who is currently involved with a number of pharmaceutical ventures, and who was previously the second in command at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and later executive vice president in charge of life sciences of Hill & Knowlton, one of the largest marketing consulting firms in the world.

"Administering a hospital requires many of the same skills it takes to run any large organization," White points out. But he says that there are also some important differences. Hospitals are not strictly top-down organizations; physicians and other health professionals have a substantial degree of autonomy. "To succeed, a hospital administrator must be able to work effectively with physicians and other professionals. Strong leadership skills are needed," he says.

Sloan Program students are exposed to the realities of the health care field through individual internships, site visits to Weill Cornell Medical Center and New York Presbyterian Hospital in New York City, and meetings in Washington, D.C., with policy makers, lobbyists, and legislative staff.

Another highlight of the curriculum is a capstone course that exposes students to projects that assess and recommend solutions for real-life situations facing health-related organizations. Recent examples of projects that Sloan students have worked on include:

- a community hospital must decide whether to upgrade or close its rehabilitation unit;
- a hospital wants to evaluate the feasibility of establishing a specialty heart center;
- a health system wants to develop a marketing plan for its home health program; and
- a hospital wonders if it is worthwhile to court patients from overseas.

At the heart of the Sloan Program education is Human Ecology's Department of Policy Analysis and Management (PAM), where Cornell is building one of the leading groups of health economists and health services researchers in the country.

Sloan students also draw on knowledge gleaned from Cornell's vast resources. Many take courses at the Johnson Graduate School of Management. Also figuring prominently in Sloan students' education are the School of Hotel Administration, the School of Industrial and Labor Relations, as well as other units in the College of Human Ecology such as the Department of Design and Environmental Analysis.

"Health care is one of the most dynamic sectors of the economy," White points out. "It has a high rate of growth. It has been very successful in assimilating new technologies and products. In 1980 it accounted for less than 9 percent of gross domestic product; 10 years ago it accounted for a bit over 13 percent; and by 2004 it was 16 percent. That's a big increase. We're skirting \$2 trillion per year," he says.

"The introduction of managed care sharply reduced the growth of prices for hospital services, especially in competitive markets. Physician compensation fell, too, especially for specialists. So there have been substantial challenges in how doctors practice medicine," he continues.

White says that growing managed care enrollments are associated with increasing consolidation in hospital markets and physicians' practices. And there is backlash from consumers to increase patients' choice of providers, which is spelling trouble for managed care.

White concludes: "In all of this, the big question for health care managers and policy makers alike is: where do we go next?"

One direction that many are working on is known as "consumer-directed health care"—on which Sloan hosted an academic conference in Ithaca last spring entitled "Consumers, Information, and the Evolving Health Care Marketplace." Although currently unlikely to be enacted, a "single payer" model of health insurance also is being discussed.

Meanwhile, quality issues are gaining growing attention, and there is wide interest in increasing the use of information technology in health care. No matter what direction things move, Sloan faculty, students, and alumni will be fully engaged in working to improve this dynamic part of our economy. ●●●

more information?

William D. White
Cornell University
Department of Policy Analysis
and Management
118 Martha Van Rensselaer Hall
Ithaca, NY, 14853-4401
607-254-6476
wdw8@cornell.edu

Brooke Hollis
Cornell University
Department of Policy Analysis
and Management
102 Martha Van Rensselaer Hall
Ithaca, NY, 14853-4401
607-254-8711
rbh25@cornell.edu