Advancing Healthcare through Research and Education

HealthPartners Institute, situated within the HealthPartners nonprofit integrated health system in Minnesota, is dedicated to advancing healthcare through research, education, and translating solutions into practice. Their research spans various fields, including behavioural health, cardiology, community health, and vaccine safety. Medical education is a significant focus, with residency and fellowship programmes covering 18 specialties and involving over 100 participants annually. They prioritise resident well-being, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and offer training to affiliate residents from regional health systems. Collaborations extend to over 125 regional schools, providing clinical experiences and focusing on social determinants of health. Additionally, the Institute is engaged in 11 collaborative networks, including the Health Care Systems Research Network, Metro Minnesota Community Oncology Research Consortium, Vaccine Safety Datalink, and Minnesota Electronic Health Record Consortium, fostering partnerships with other health systems and organisations nationally and internationally.

Mission Statement: Enhancing Health and Well-being

The HealthPartners Institute, established as a nonprofit in 2016, operates within HealthPartners as one of its four divisions, overseen by a board of directors comprising leaders from the health system and the community. Its organisational structure includes four major departments, units, and centres of excellence, with close integration across HealthPartners' health plan, care group, and the Institute. The Institute relies heavily on external funding, primarily through competitive grants, with research-related revenues totalling approximately US$45 million. Core research activities are supported by federal grants, with an additional US$40 million in federal funding for graduate medical education. Philanthropy also plays a crucial role in funding specific areas such as neuroscience, cancer research, and capital improvements.

The Institute's main objective is to enhance health and well-being, focusing on equity, patient experience, affordability of care, population health, and workforce well-being. This is achieved through knowledge management, educational performance, and practice management, emphasising scientific discovery and scholarship. Annually, the Institute administers hundreds of research studies, including cancer studies through the MMCORC network, resulting in numerous publications and knowledge products. These findings are disseminated through an online portal accessible to all HealthPartners employees, facilitating care process redesign and program improvements. Educational programs, such as clinical simulation services, are also widely implemented within the HealthPartners system and the broader community, benefiting thousands of health professionals annually.

One Framework for Advancing Healthcare: Structure and Function of the Institute

The HealthPartners Institute has developed a framework to guide its work, emphasising evidence-based practices to improve population health, care experience, affordability, and health equity. This framework focuses on knowledge management, sharing insights, and collaborative problem-solving. It involves two pathways: research-informed practice and practice-informed research. The Institute's organisational structure comprises four departments: Research and Evaluation, Office of Health Professional Education, Centers of Research and Education, and Administration.

The Research and Evaluation department conducts diverse research with a focus on local and national health priorities, primarily supported by federal funding. The Office of Health Professional Education oversees graduate medical education and clinical rotations for thousands of students annually, supported by federal funds and HealthPartners. The Centers of Research and Education, situated within the HealthPartners care delivery system, operate with shared leadership, openness, and merit, and are funded by industry-sponsored trials, federal projects, and philanthropy. The Administration department provides support in communication, project and contract management, compliance, finance, and administration, ensuring coordination and integrity across the Institute's activities.

Structures and Tools to Enhance Collaboration and Community Engagement

The HealthPartners Institute has established various structures and tools to facilitate collaboration across the organisation and the community, aiming to enhance learning and research capabilities. One such tool is the Knowledge Exchange website, providing access to scholarly work for all HealthPartners colleagues and clinicians via the Epic electronic medical record system. Integration efforts, such as the Center for Oral Health Integration, involve multiple stakeholders within HealthPartners to translate research into clinical solutions, exemplifying shared leadership and resource investment.

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Centralisation of education support within the Institute ensures efficiency and alignment with strategic needs, including graduate medical education (GME) programs, fellowships, and student experiences. The Institute also participates in initiatives like the Learning Health System Embedded Scientist Training and Research program, cultivating the next generation of LHS scientists. During the Covid-19 pandemic, central coordination of GME facilitated the rapid adaptation of education programmes to meet evolving needs, such as virtual case conferences and resident redeployment.

The Center for Evaluation and Survey Research offers robust evaluation services across the health system, including surveys, quality and cost assessments, and patient experience measurements. Additionally, the Institute collaborates with the HealthPartners health plan to establish the Community Advisory Council for Research and Evaluation, engaging diverse community members to ensure research aligns with community needs and interests. This council provides valuable feedback to strengthen ties between Institute research and community concerns, reflecting the organisation's commitment to addressing social injustices and promoting community engagement.

Driving Impact: Strategies and Outcomes of the HealthPartners Institute

The HealthPartners Institute has implemented various strategies to increase awareness, relevance, and effectiveness within the larger health system, aiming to accelerate performance and improve patient care. Communication efforts, including newsletters, virtual presentations, and marketing initiatives, have enhanced awareness of the Institute's work among HealthPartners colleagues. Feedback from senior leaders indicates increased awareness and connections between their work and the Institute's efforts, with a majority recognising the value accruing to HealthPartners' care delivery, patients, and the community.

Examples of research-to-practice translation demonstrate the Institute's impact on patient care, clinical decision support, and population health. For instance, the analysis of blood pressure measurements following the adoption of automated devices led to improved hypertension diagnosis and patient care. Suicide prevention strategies, integrated within the electronic medical record, have enabled targeted interventions and outreach to at-risk individuals. The development of clinical decision support tools, such as the Priority Wizard, has significantly improved cardiovascular disease risk management without adding substantial costs.

In addition, research studies like the Hyperlink trial have demonstrated the effectiveness of interventions such as home blood pressure telemonitoring in reducing cardiovascular events. However, internal adoption of such interventions may face barriers such as competing priorities and resource constraints.

Efforts to enhance workforce health and well-being, exemplified by the Be Well programme, have resulted in significant reductions in health risks among employees, leading to substantial cost savings and productivity gains. Measurement tools like the summary measures of health and well-being metric enable ongoing assessment of progress towards organisational goals and priorities.

Overall, the Institute's integration with the care system, alignment with strategic goals, accessibility of knowledge products, adaptation to funding and technological shifts, and engagement with the community are critical factors contributing to its success as a high-performing learning health system.

The HealthPartners Institute looks ahead with a focus on aligning research and education efforts with primary and speciality care settings, which is crucial for operating as a Learning Health System (LHS). Challenges such as securing sustainable funding, workforce development, prioritising high-value solutions, and addressing health inequities are on the agenda. The Institute aims to establish a sustainable funding stream, develop workforce pipeline programmes, prioritise high-value solutions, and address health inequities by prioritising patient and member voices. They plan to partner with schools and universities, innovate funding models, optimise data usage, and prioritise community outreach and inclusion to overcome these challenges and continue generating positive outcomes.

Source: NEJM Catalyst

Published on : Wed, 22 May 2024

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