

# Building an Infrastructure

to Train Hispanic Health Care Workers

By Frank DiMaria

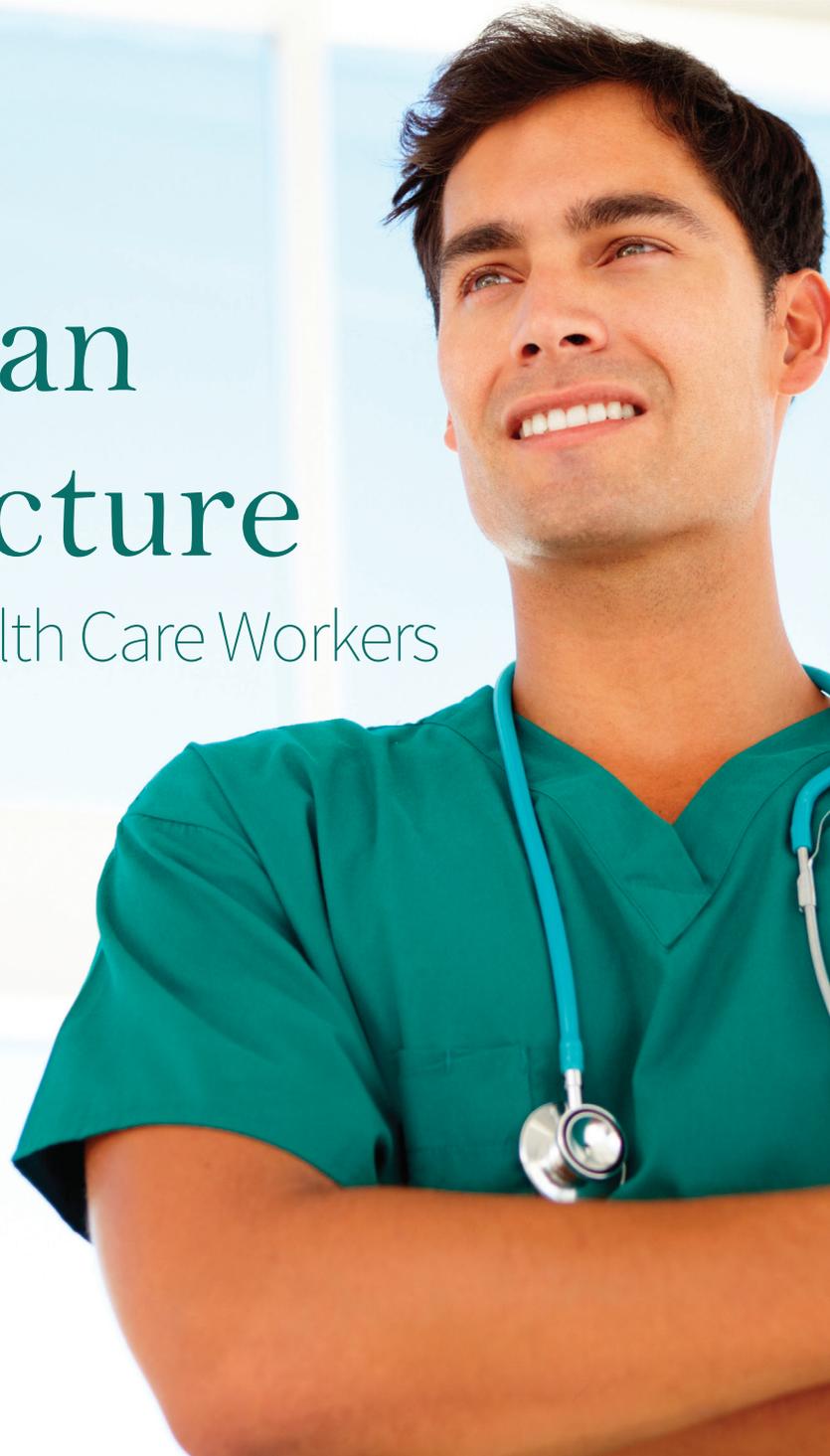


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In America's business world corporations protect their information and talent and are loath to share best practices or training strategies with their competitors. Coca-Cola keeps its secret recipe in a vault.

Health care is the exception.

"When I first came to health care I came from the consulting world and I wasn't aware of the spirit of cooperation that takes place in workforce development. It's a little bit different from anything I have seen in business," says Jan Hunter, program director at CareerSTAT, a project of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions and Jobs for the Future. "In the health care arena, organizations are more open to partnering to ensure there are plenty of workers available."

CareerSTAT, now in its fifth year, is an employer-led national collaboration of health care leaders who promote employer investment in the skill and career development of frontline health care workers. It's a clearinghouse for best practices in health care and it encourages health care companies to share information and training development.

Currently over 100 health care organizations, such as Kaiser Permanente and Banner Health, partner with CareerSTAT. Many of the initiatives these organizations advance focus on early college and career pathway programs providing low-income and minority students with access to in-demand health care careers. One of the goals is to ensure the demographics of their caregiver population match that of the community. "A lot of the organizations we work with have large Hispanic populations and have started working on initiatives that would get Hispanic youth engaged in health care careers," says Hunter.

One health care facility working to ensure its workforce mirrors that of the community is City of Hope, a leading research and treatment center for cancer, diabetes and other life-threatening diseases. It is located in Duarte, California, which is 71 percent Hispanic.

City of Hope's primary objective is to deliver the best possible care to its patients. To do that in a community that is 71 percent Hispanic its frontline workers must understand and appreciate the cultural, ethnic and religious sensitivities of Hispanics, says Stephanie Neuvirth, chief human resources and diversity officer at City of Hope. "It's all about gaining the trust of the patients, their families and of the community," says Neuvirth. "We believe that we have a role in making our community thrive through better understanding about how to live in a healthy manner."

City of Hope educates Hispanics in Duarte about nutrition, exercising, early screenings and vaccinations. "We believe all (these) different variables are important to support the community," says Neuvirth. "To best understand how to support them we have to understand the community at large. If our employees mirror the community, we believe that will help us to better serve our patients and understand our patients' needs."

City of Hope has implemented a number of initiatives to lure talented Hispanics into the health care field. "We have substantial efforts to recruit existing health care professionals as well as college students to join City of Hope," says Neuvirth.

Only 6 percent of the physicians and 8 percent of the nurses in the U.S. are Hispanic, according to Neuvirth. "This is a very small number com-

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Jan Hunter, program director  
at CareerSTAT

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pared to the demographic that we're trying to serve," she says. But Neuvirth has turned this negative, into a positive. "We have a huge opportunity to improve the pipeline to serve the community," she says.

City of Hope seeks the brightest students from its community. To attract them Neuvirth starts recruiting as early as the third grade, hoping to spark an interest in science that will encourage the young people to hone the skills necessary to gain a clinical perspective and ultimately lead to a career as a physician or nurse.

Not everyone, however, has the aptitude or desire to be a physician or nurse. And that's OK. "There are lots and lots of jobs in health care that are called the middle skill jobs that do not require a four-year degree and are not clinically focused," says Neuvirth.

Some don't even require strength in math or science.

Jobs in accounting, finance, IT and administration are plentiful in health care. Although these jobs provide the infrastructure for the health care industry, parents, guidance counselors and students don't realize they exist.

The most innovative project that Neuvirth oversees is the TEACH Project (Train, Educate, and Accelerate Careers in Healthcare). Under City of Hope's guidance, the Duarte United School District and Citrus College developed a curriculum that allows students to earn college credits and certifications while still in high school. The classes meet on the high school's campus.

The TEACH Project seeks to create skilled workers in health IT. "We think this is a real win-win for the hospital healthcare community because we need health IT," says Neuvirth.

The most intriguing aspect of this project, says Neuvirth, is that the high school students transition directly from 12<sup>th</sup> grade to college without leaving the school and their comfort zone. "They just keep taking classes...By the time they graduate they have the beginnings of an AA degree," says Neuvirth.

The program's price tag makes it even more attractive to the low-income student. Because TEACH students do not receive their high school



**Stephanie Neuvirth**, chief human resources and diversity officer at City of Hope. ▲

diploma until they complete the program, they are considered public school students. All the courses they take on the high school campus are free.

In addition to classroom experience, TEACH students visit City of Hope and work side-by-side with current employees and during the summer they participate in internships. Once students make it to the second or third year of the program, they start taking their courses at the Citrus College campus.

With its outreach programs that build the pipeline of Hispanics in health care and its high profile within the Hispanic community of Duarte, City of Hope is trying to improve the quality of life for those in its community. But it's a challenge. "Even when you recognize that an organization should mirror the community, it's not as simple as may seem. It takes time to develop the paths and the relationships and the pipeline to make real and sustainable change," says Neuvirth. •