

I. Introduction



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In August 2006, the SUNY Upstate Medical University in Syracuse (“Upstate”) initiated a partnership with Richard Butler and Jimmy Helm (Butler/Helm) to complete an “environmental scan” of those internal processes and procedures of greatest impact to both internal (students, faculty, researchers and staff) and external (patients, collaborating hospitals and members of the Syracuse community and the surrounding regional area) constituents . This initiative will isolate and bring focus to those processes that are clearly facilitating Upstate’s mission as well as those that create unique challenges and, in some cases, barriers or impediments to more rapid achievement of goals and objectives.

To do justice to the complexity of those administrative structures somewhat unique to Upstate, the collaboration has included numerous interviews with individuals and small groups of staff and professionals from University Hospital, a major component of the Upstate system. The hospital is, of course, itself a complex institution with many intricate and extensive relationships all its own.

Upstate holds a unique position among health care providers in Syracuse and the Central New York area. This is due not only to the fact that medical, nursing, graduate school and health professions students as well as medical residents learn and train there, but also because in many respects they are the region’s foremost health care provider. The hospital houses the region’s level one trauma center, a renowned orthopedics department and a well respected regional pediatric care delivery system, to name just a few areas of excellence. As one respondent put it, “Upstate is known for its care and its caring.”

It is also true, however, that Upstate’s reputation with the general public has both waxed and waned in the past several decades due to a number of factors and forces, some of which will be touched upon in the body of this report. As a result of some of these economic and administrative issues as well as a desire to make Upstate everything it can possibly be, President David Smith has commissioned this engagement. He believes it is a necessary first step in his previously announced “Engaging Excellence” initiative.

It is anticipated that once this environmental scan is complete, a number of cross-functional Presidential Select Task Teams will be comprised. These teams, utilizing the environmental scan to the extent they believe appropriate, will begin the hard work of drilling deeper to examine internal and external processes. Ultimately they will be expected to deliver recommendations to the President and his executive staff leading to systems improvement.

If this larger process of “Engaging Excellence” is to achieve its goals of creating systems improvements and advancing the impact of Upstate beyond Syracuse and Central New York, all members of the Upstate and University Hospital communities – whether they are members of the Upstate Council, employees of the university, students or alumni – will have to work together closely and collaboratively. By so doing, it is expected they will discover, develop and maintain improvements in the way Upstate functions in teaching, clinical care, research and as an economic driver, so that the true value of the institution can be perceived and valued by a much larger audience.

This has been a complex assignment and one that has called upon the energy, talent and engagement of countless individuals at Upstate. Everyone who participated in this effort should be commended and particularly those who disrupted their already busy schedules to facilitate and contribute to the process in a number of invaluable ways.

An important note on the research

The results of qualitative research, such as the interviews and group discussions undertaken at Upstate, cannot be considered in and of themselves as absolutely representative of the entire Upstate “family.” The value of the information gleaned from these many discussions and other secondary sources lies in its ability to provide strategic direction and to stimulate discussion about the value of careful planning. It is important to keep in mind that the findings or “themes” contained in this report stem from participant’s *images and perceptions*, which in some cases may not be factually correct. To the extent possible, Butler/Helm have endeavored to “test” information through secondary sources.