Accomplishment through Collaboration

MASSAHEC Network

30th Anniversary Celebration
I am so grateful to be working with the MassAHEC Network. For 30 years, MassAHEC has helped students of all ages and backgrounds experience providing health care in the community and the satisfaction of helping others. My most thrilling experiences as a teacher have come when students get hooked and commit their careers to serving those most in need.

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United Goals, Unique Programs

**Pamela E. Smith**

Pamela E. Smith, was a coordinator at the Pioneer Valley AHEC (PVAHEC) in the late 1980s and remains deeply impassioned about REACH, their youth development program. Now a program coordinator for the Mass. Department of Public Health, Office of Rural Health, Pam has extensive experience in community outreach. She serves as a member of the PVAHEC Advisory Board and recently co-chaired an event to bring PVAHEC alumni together for a reunion breakfast. The event was an opportunity to reach back and reconnect with individuals who took part in PVAHEC programs as youth and are now practicing in the health professions.

“This was a perfect networking occasion and a chance to inspire our current REACH students to see where careers in the health professions can lead them,” she explained. “Our alumni are role models and are perfect to tap into for programming resources, such as guest speakers, mentors and new sites for field learning.

“I live in Springfield and see some of my former students often,” she said. “It does my heart good to see how the REACH program opened up health career opportunities in the community for them.”

**Diane Weinstein**

Diane Weinstein, OTR, MS was one of the founding members of the Board of Directors of the Berkshire AHEC. As a new organization, Berkshire AHEC quickly took an active role in convening taskforces in the areas of mental health, childcare and gerontology. The goal was to gather information and assess staff education and training needs so they could develop programs to fill the gaps. “It was a gift to the community,” she said. “I have always loved this organization and what it is all about.”

Diane is the Executive Director of EPOCH Assisted Living at Melbourne in Pittsfield and recently rejoined the Berkshire AHEC Board of Directors. “As an individual consumer, I too have much to gain,” she said. “Berkshire AHEC has a history of building and maintaining a strong network with community partners that benefits agencies and individuals alike.”
"I live in Springfield and see some of my former students often," she said. "It does my heart good to see how the REACH program opened up health career opportunities in the community for them."

Pamela E. Smith
United Goals, Unique Programs

Pam Kavanaugh
Pam Kavanaugh, MHSA, is Director of Program Planning and Education for the Greater New Bedford Community Health Center. When AHEC of Southeastern Massachusetts (AHECSE) launched the Medical Interpreter Training program, she quickly recognized the benefits it would provide the community and her bilingual healthcare employees. In the communities in and around New Bedford, many people speak Spanish and Portuguese.

“We have been able to tap into the medical interpreter training program with great results,” she said. “We’ve had 11 employees participate; three of them now serve as full time medical interpreters; one of them also functions as a patient care advocate.”

Pam finds that the employees are much more comfortable in their roles at the health center. “As a result of the training, the patient flow in our health center is faster and smoother, and the switchboard operators know exactly which staff to call upon as first responders to urgent calls,” she explained.

Pam serves on the AHECSE Advisory Board. This participation has opened up numerous opportunities for the New Bedford Community Health Center. AHECSE also provides education to the community health center staff on topics such as HIV, depression, diabetes, health literacy, cultural diversity and more.

Karen Shack
Karen Shack has worked closely with the Boston Area Health Education Center (BAHEC) for many years both as an Advisory Board member and as a community partner on youth development services. Karen is a senior workforce development consultant with Commonwealth Corporation, dedicated to addressing education and workforce development needs throughout Massachusetts. Previously, Karen was with the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC). The Boston PIC connects the youth and adults of Boston to education and employment opportunities through collaborations with industry, public schools and community-based organizations.

“Working with BAHEC staff and serving on their Advisory Board has given our organizations opportunities to share resources and collaborate on developing dynamic youth programs and top notch work-based internships,” Karen said. “The amazing thing about working with youth is that you get to witness these huge transformations from secondary school, to college, to health professions training, and then to practice,” she said. “The work BAHEC does and has been doing for three decades has made a terrific impact on individuals and the community-at-large.”
Since 1995, Bruce Gould, MD, has been the director of the Connecticut AHEC program and is Associate Dean for Primary Care at the University of Connecticut. He was chief resident in internal medicine, a fellow, and then director of the General Internal Medicine and Primary Care Fellowship at UMass in the early 1980s.

“Sometimes you don’t realize the influence of AHEC on your career,” said Dr. Gould. “While reviewing some files a few years ago, I came across papers describing the community outreach experiences I’d developed for students at UMass. Across the top of each paper was the Central Mass. AHEC logo.”

“I had never realized that I’d been an AHECer since the ‘80s. AHEC is often the invisible thread that ties students and residents to the community – during training and in their professional careers.”

Twenty-five years later, Dr. Gould continues his advocacy for AHEC programs locally and nationally with the National AHEC Organization and the Bureau of Health Professions in the Health Resources and Services Administration.
Luz Feliciano loves what she does! Trained as a Certified Nurse Assistant, and employed at Mercy Medical Center since 1978, she completed the Pioneer Valley AHEC Medical Interpreter Training program in 2000. That was when she discovered her passion and began to work full time as an interpreter.

Previously, Mercy Medical only had on-call interpreters. Recognizing the value of interpreter services to the community, they added three full time medical interpreter positions shortly thereafter.

“Taking this training has been a big plus for my career,” she said. “People recognize me wherever I go. They say, ‘There’s my interpreter.’”

Luz encourages other bilingual healthcare employees to complete the training.

“It’s not just about learning the medical vocabulary, it’s about learning how to become a cultural broker and how to handle sensitive situations,” she explained. “Patients tell me they come to Mercy Medical because medical services are easier and faster for them to obtain with medical interpreters on staff.”

– Luz Feliciano
Medical Interpreters: Bridging the Linguistic Divide

Liliana A. Zagaria, Coordinator of Interpreter Services at Lawrence General Hospital, has worked closely with the Merrimack Valley AHEC (MVAHEC) since 1993.

Bilingual employees at the hospital were among the first in the region to participate in Medical Interpreter Training program. Since then, more than 150 employees have received medical interpreter training through MVAHEC.

The collaboration between Lawrence General Hospital and MVAHEC has created equal access and service to patients facing linguistic and cultural barriers.

“AHEC leadership in the medical interpreter field has provided our bilingual employees the opportunity to receive state-of-the-art medical interpreter training and help their local community,” Liliana said.

“Our patients now have a voice,” she added. “They can express their feelings and their symptoms, and give a more accurate medical history through the use of competent, qualified interpreters.”

Sonia R. Falcos has worked as a medical interpreter for more than 10 years. And she gives all the credit to the Merrimack Valley AHEC (MVAHEC).

She completed her Medical Interpreter Training at MVAHEC. She worked with their staff to develop the curriculum for a basic Portuguese Medical Terminology and Anatomy/Physiology course and began teaching the course in 2003.

In sharing her thoughts with other AHEC participants, Sonia cautions interpreters, “Do not assume that you know what either the patient or the provider are talking about. When in doubt, ask. Your humble approach and honestly will get you through any situation and will make people value and appreciate you.”

Sonia provides medical interpreter services at Mt. Auburn Hospital, Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation’s Institute for Linguistic and Cultural Skills and at Lowell General Hospital. In the future, she plans a gradual transition toward becoming a written translator.
Professional Development

“The Central Massachusetts AHEC Outreach Worker Training Institute is an enrichment program that has been my foundation for achievement,” said Rosa Fernandez-Peña loyal. Rosa was a student in the pilot certificate program in 2001 and has been a co-facilitator, training with CMAHEC staff ever since.

Rosa began as a community outreach worker in 1999, working at UMass Memorial Health Care. Shortly after she completed the program, her career began to take off. She is currently the Special Projects Coordinator, a highly visible position in the community. She never misses an opportunity to talk about her career path and promote the value of the Outreach Worker Training Institute.

“"The staff at CMAHEC is wonderful," she said. "They are always willing to help me identify resources that ultimately strengthen the whole community."

Medical Interpreter Training

Each year, MassAHEC provides training for more than 300 medical interpreters who speak languages ranging from Albanian to Mandarin to Twe to Urdu. The program is offered in partnership with Commonwealth Medicine’s Office of Community Program, with support from the Mass. Executive Office of Health and Human Services. Ensuring understanding between patient and provider is a critical component of providing culturally competent healthcare.
Community Health Worker Program Leads to New Careers

Curtis Lopes had been working as a public health educator in men’s health services for several years when he was asked to participate in the Central Massachusetts AHEC (CMAHEC) 45-hour Community Health Worker certificate course in 2004.

The course is part of CMAHEC’s Outreach Worker Training Institute. The training provides techniques for enhanced communication between community health workers and their clients or healthcare providers; structures for organizing work in functional ways; and opportunities to network with community colleagues in the public education arena.

In 2008, CMAHEC asked Curtis to co-facilitate portions of the new patient navigator course. In his usual role as health educator, Curtis teaches youths about reproductive health, such as family planning, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS.

“It was a good experience to train under the direction of the CMAHEC staff,” he said. “I get very different feedback from my peers than I do when I present to youth. Their feedback helped me to organize myself differently and more clearly explain the differing perspectives of men and women.”

Recognizing his talent as a health educator, CMAHEC asked him to co-present a session on community health workers at the 2006 American Public Health Association conference in Boston. And thanks to his involvement in CMAHEC, he now plans to pursue further education and advance his healthcare career.

“I learned about the Health and Human Services program offered at Springfield Technical Community College during the training program,” he said. “I plan to apply so I can go on to earn my bachelor’s degree. I’ve also referred people to the CMAHEC for training because it helped me a lot. Because of it, I have a career direction for myself.”

– Curtis Lopes
Professional Development

Access to appropriate healthcare is not only limited by an inadequate number of providers, but also by the expertise of the providers that are available. MassAHEC Network stays on the cutting edge of training and professional development to ensure workers can gain the latest knowledge and maintain their skills. MassAHEC designs and delivers the training needed for emerging health professions, such as community health workers and medical interpreters, and provides continuing education about critical health topics.

Continuing Education

Since its inception as the first Massachusetts AHEC center, the Berkshire AHEC has been the leader in providing interdisciplinary continuing education programs in the western part of the state. Berkshire AHEC supports the professional development of more than 3,000 individuals annually.

Betty Chludzinski, RN, MS, has been involved with the Berkshire AHEC since the very beginning. In the early 1980s, Betty was employed by the Berkshire Medical Center, developing community and health education programs. The Berkshire AHEC was located in the same building.

“My introduction to Berkshire AHEC began when I was asked to develop and teach a patient education course for hospital nurses,” she shared. Over the years, Betty has referred many staff members to Berkshire AHEC-sponsored seminars. Recently, she was asked to join the Berkshire AHEC Board of Directors. Her experience and on-going interest in health education and staff development are naturally aligned with the organization’s mission.

Correctional Health

When thinking of healthcare settings, a prison may not come to mind. UMass Medical School provides healthcare to the state’s 10,000 inmates, employing more than 400 healthcare professionals at 18 sites. AHEC of Southeastern Massachusetts (AHECSE) recognized that the clinical staff in this setting face professional isolation and unique stressors.

AHECSE, with funding from the medical school’s Commonwealth Medicine division, partnered with Sandra Hunnicutt-Ludlam, RN, education and training coordinator for UMass Correctional Health, to develop a professional development plan and co-facilitate training.

The first effort was a staff development program in training techniques. Another was Health Disparities and Cultural Responsiveness, a seminar that recognized the disparity of a predominately white workforce serving an ethnically diverse prison population. This resulted in paradigm shifts regarding their own work practices. AHECSE, with the UMass Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, also coordinated a day long stress reduction retreat.

Community Health Worker Training

According to the Mass. Department of Public Health, more than 60 job titles reflect the essential role that community health workers play in improving access and coordinating healthcare services.

The Central Massachusetts AHEC (CMAHEC) is home of the Outreach Worker Training Institute. CMAHEC has become a nationally-recognized leader in community health worker training and advocacy. The Outreach Worker Training Institute offers certificate courses, approved for college credit. It is the springboard for a community health worker’s professional development.

CMAHEC leveraged its experience and partnered with AHECSE to create a training program for patient navigators and supervisors in the Mass. Dept. of Pubic Health Women’s Health Network and Men’s Health Program. Pioneer Valley AHEC also supports the professional development of community health workers and formed a coalition that became an affiliate of the Massachusetts Association of Community Health Workers.
Community Health Clerkship Spurs GLBT Advocacy

For Jessica Wang, a fourth year medical student at UMass Medical School, her most compelling experience occurred during her first year of study: The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) Community Health Clerkship, coordinated by the AHEC of Southeastern Massachusetts and the UMass Office of Medical Education. Interested in GLBT health advocacy, Jessica took on a two-week, full time clerkship that took her to various community sites and addressed healthcare concerns and advocacy issues specific to the GLBT community.

“I had been interested in the issues of the GLBT community prior to medical school and thought this was a great opportunity to learn firsthand,” Jessica said. “The faculty’s willingness to share a wealth of GLBT healthcare resources and provide continuous support inspired me to pursue this interest further.”

During the next two years, Jessica helped resurrect a student organization known as QMass (Queers at UMass), a GLBT advocacy group that is open to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and heterosexual allies. The group’s mission was to raise awareness of GLBT healthcare issues and to begin the process of developing a curriculum that could be integrated into courses at UMass.

“Discrimination against GLBT people often takes form in lack of representation, whether it is in healthcare curriculum, medical research, or clinical practice,” she explained. “As much as anyone else, they deserve healthcare that is both relevant to their needs and welcoming to their GLBT identity. The best way to do that is to educate medical students, nursing students and all healthcare providers about GLBT healthcare concerns.”

The leadership of Jessica and her student colleagues established a framework for civic awareness and social action for GLBT health education issues, as well as the larger issue of cultural competency. In 2007, Jessica and QMass were honored with the GLBT Health Achievement Award by the American Medical Student Association and the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association.

According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, by 2020, the nation will need nearly 140,000 family medicine physicians, requiring more than 1,000 graduates each year.

“During the past 30 years of collaboration between the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health and the MassAHEC Network, we can identify many shared accomplishments. In the decades to come, we must continue to partner and foster the passion of medical school applicants, medical students and residents to provide community-based primary care, particularly to those most vulnerable.”

– Daniel J. Lasser, MD, MPH
Chair, UMass Department of Family Medicine and Community Health
UMass Medical School and the MassAHEC Network are continually working toward the common goal of providing primary care for underserved populations.

Family Medicine Rotations

As a third-year medical student at UMass in 1999, Philip Bolduc, MD, participated in a family medicine rotation at the Greater Lawrence Family Health Center. The health center is a UMass teaching site, and the country’s first community health center-sponsored residency program.

The rotation, sponsored by Merrimack Valley AHEC, influenced his decision to complete his family medicine residency at the health center. He now works as an attending physician, with expertise in HIV and Hepatitis C; as a faculty member in the UMass Department of Family Medicine and Community Health, and as a preceptor for medical students.

Health Care Workforce Center

A requirement of AHEC programs includes assessment of the state’s healthcare needs and service capacity. Over the years, MassAHEC has done this at the neighborhood, city and state level. In 2008, the Massachusetts General Court created a Health Care Workforce Center, charged with improving access to healthcare services. This charge is timely; as the Commonwealth achieves universal insurance coverage, the challenge of access to healthcare services, particularly primary care, has increased. MassAHEC and the Mass. Department of Public Health’s Primary Care Office anticipated this concern in 2006 and began to work together.

According to the Health Resources and Services Administration, the greatest opportunities for influencing the environments affecting the healthcare workforce lie within state governments. Research shows that only a few states use this advantage to institute innovative and far-reaching policies. With this new Health Care Workforce Center, the Commonwealth is again leading the way in healthcare reform.

“This externship changed my view of family medicine. If I spent another week there, I would be an expert in diabetes and gynecology. From observing my family doc, I thought all it entailed was writing and renewing prescriptions. But I learned that family medicine is much more than that and now family medicine is something I’m considering.”

“Last week was the last week of my externship. It is bittersweet because while it is nice not to have to come home from an hour commute everyday, part of me doesn’t want to leave. What I said at the beginning, I will say again now, because it still holds true: the people I’ve worked with are like a family. They are all dedicated, passionate, hardworking, funny, vivacious individuals. They taught me a lot about medicine.”
Creating a Culturally-Competent Workforce

MassAHEC’s mission is deeply intertwined with UMass Medical School’s focus on primary care.

“UMass Medical pioneered community-based, primary care training programs. Some programs, such as the community-based Longitudinal Preceptor Program (LPP), were conceived jointly with MassAHEC,” said Michele P. Pugnaire, MD, Senior Associate Dean for Educational Affairs.

“The LPP, once an elective, is now a requirement for all medical students during their first and second years. Courses such as the LPP, the Community Health Clerkship and the third-year family medicine rotation, offer our students experiences beyond the walls of this institution; contributing to our success nationally as a top educator of primary care physicians and nurses,” she stated.

Community Health Clerkship

For two weeks each October, the formal class schedule is suspended for first-year medical and second-year graduate nursing students. Instead, students learn from the community.

Training sites include prisons, state hospitals, advocacy agencies, community health centers and community members’ homes and neighborhoods.

In the Geriatrics Clerkship, students see the eldercare system from the patient perspective. For five UMass graduate nursing students, in 2007, the clerkship evolved into a community service learning project.

During the Clerkship, the students met elders in their homes, during doctor visits, and at senior service sites. They learned of the elders’ frustration with the complexity of treatment instructions and this developed into a project on health literacy awareness. The students honed their skills as advocates, teachers and caregivers – and provided in-service training on plain language communication skills to the case management staff at Elder Services of Worcester Area, Inc.

“This experience provided a vital step toward becoming the kind of provider I’ve always aspired to be: kind, compassionate and caring,” said Henry Hoang, RN.

“Health literacy is about ensuring the client has understanding about prevention, maintenance, treatment and the healing involved with an injury or disease process. When you have the skill to effectively share your understanding about a subject, you have truly made a difference.”

Rural Health Scholars

Established in 2000, the UMass Rural Health Scholars program offers medical and nursing students the opportunity to experience clinical practice in rural and small town America.

Rachel Blake, MD, a 2008 graduate of UMass Medical School and now a Family Medicine resident in Portland, Maine, recently starred in a video highlighting the Rural Health Scholars program.

“During my first year of medical school I was assigned to a preceptor, Alexandra Schultes, MD who works in the town of Barre,” she said. “As a student, I had some of my earliest exposures to family medicine. I enjoyed the variety of patient encounters, from well-baby exams to adolescents to geriatrics.

“It became clear to me that my interests and values are well aligned with the practice of family medicine. I enjoy the breadth of family medicine, both demographically and physiologically,” she explained. “The challenge of deciphering a wide range of complex medical problems keeps me engaged and constantly learning.”
“It was especially honoring to see the nursing profession being recognized for its impact and contributions and realize that I am a part of that,” she said.

She received her bachelor’s degree and intended to move forward at the graduate level in the surgical clinical nurse specialty. Then she learned about a new program for gerontological nurse practitioners at UMass Lowell. Deciding to explore her options, she had a 30-minute interview with the department chair.

“It entirely changed the trajectory of my career,” Karen said. “I have always gravitated toward care of older adults, realizing how much I could learn from them and give in return.”

When asked about her advice for those considering a career in nursing she replied, “I start by listening for positive personal and family experiences with the healthcare system. When I hear about an older loved one who has received good care, I have an opportunity to talk about the many important ways a career in nursing impacts the lives of individuals and their families.”

These two women and the other partners of MVAHEC’s Latino Nursing Pipeline can see the results of their dedication in the story of Virgilio Velez, RN, now working at Lawrence General Hospital.

Virgilio persevered over a seven-year period and successfully completed his RN degree at Northern Essex Community College, with continuous financial and staff support from MVAHEC. Virgilio attributes his success to MVAHEC staff who continually encouraged and inspired him.

“I am proud to be part of this life changing organization,” he said. Virgilio plans to pursue an MBA and apply it in health care administration.

Supporting students and recognizing superb nursing faculty is only part of the equation. Preceptors, particularly those working in the community, are critical to AHEC’s objective of creating a workforce prepared to care for those most vulnerable.

The Central Massachusetts AHEC recognizes the value of community-based preceptors for students such as Michelle Gasbarro, FNP, a 2002 graduate of the UMass Worcester Graduate School of Nursing. Michelle completed her community service project through the Gardner VNA Community Service Center in Fitchburg, providing healthcare education at a drop-in center for the homeless.

Despite her initial fear, she was able to apply her academic training and recognize the deep impact healthcare disparities have and counter that with compassionate care. The alliances she was able to foster with the clients gave her a better perspective about cultural competencies and healthcare issues.

Recognizing the impact this experience had on her, Michelle became a preceptor to nursing students at the family medicine practice of Dr. Robert A. Babineau, Jr., in Fitchburg.

“I love precepting,” she said. “I like giving back and it keeps me sharp.”
Filling the Nursing Gap

The United States is in the midst of a nursing shortage. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than 1 million new nurses will be needed by 2016. MassAHEC wants to ensure that these new nurses will reflect the cultural diversity of the patients they will serve and make a commitment to caring for vulnerable populations.

Lawrence, for example, is nearly 70 percent Latino. Until recently, you could count the number of Latino nurses on less than two hands. The Lawrence Latino Nursing Pipeline was established in 2002 by the Merrimack Valley AHEC (MVAHEC), with a coalition that includes workforce investment boards, nursing training programs and other partners. This pipeline focused on creating systems to support Latinos with academic preparation, mentoring and stipends, to ensure that the students could focus on their academics while still supporting their families.

The program has since celebrated the successes of 10 Latino nurses who have each made a commitment of service in Lawrence, with more than 100 additional Latino men and women at various stages of the nursing career pipeline.

Some nurses give back to their communities again and again. Lisa M. Abdallah, PhD, RN is an assistant professor of nursing at UMass Lowell. In 1986, she was recognized by the Greater Lowell AHEC (now the MVAHEC) with an Outstanding Nurse Award. Twenty years later, she is back teaching at MVAHEC’s summer academy for the Latino nursing project and a member of the MVAHEC Advisory Board.

Lisa wanted to be a nurse for as long as she can remember.

“In order to achieve true personal satisfaction, I believe that a person must have a passion for the work that they do,” said Lisa, who was born and raised in Lawrence. “Being a part of the promotion and awareness of careers in nursing – and playing a role in the educational preparation of our future nurse workforce, is my passion and the work that I am most proud of.”

Karen Devereaux Melillo, PhD, APRN, BC, FAANP, Professor and Chair of the Nursing Department at UMass Lowell, likewise remembers the humbling experience of being nominated and receiving one of MVAHEC’s Outstanding Nurse awards in 1993.

“In order to achieve true personal satisfaction, I believe that a person must have a passion for the work that they do. Being a part of the promotion and awareness of careers in nursing educational preparation of our future nurse workforce, is my passion and the work that I am most proud of.”

– Lisa M. Abdallah, PhD, RN

Lawrence Latino Nursing Program at the Merrimack Valley AHEC.
Putting the Future Into Perspective

Stephanie Jacobo began exploring health career occupations as a high school senior, through the Merrimack Valley AHEC (MVAHEC) after school program. MVAHEC established an internship placement for Stephanie in the Human Resources Department of the Greater Lawrence Family Health Center, the host organization for MVAHEC.

“I had always considered working in the health field and through MVAHEC, I realized that it was something that I wanted to pursue as a career,” Stephanie said. “Working in the health field has become one of my primary goals.”

Stephanie is majoring in pre-medical studies at UMass Amherst. During summers, she still works in the position she held as an MVAHEC intern. In the future she envisions herself “running a pediatric center in the Merrimack Valley and traveling around the world to teach children about community health and academics.”

Through MVAHEC, Stephanie acquired a broad view of how a community health center operates, took part in health education seminars and became certified in CPR. Some of the friendships she made through MVAHEC are still strong today and she notes that many have continued on pathways for a career in healthcare.

“When I look back at MVAHEC, I will remember being part of a fun program that helped me put my future into perspective,” she noted.

“I had always considered working in the health field and through MVAHEC I realized that it was something that I wanted to pursue as a career,” Stephanie said. “Working in the health field has become one of my primary goals.”

– Stephanie Jacobo
REACH Program Inspires Teen to Focus on her Future

Jessica Johnson was a high school sophomore, juggling academics, sports, ROTC and a part-time job, when a friend persuaded her to attend the Recruitment and Education Assistance for Careers in Health (REACH) after school program.

Sponsored by the Pioneer Valley AHEC and hosted by the City of Springfield Department of Health and Human Services, the REACH program offered a variety of health education seminars that sparked Jessica’s interest. The program also offered field trips to visit health professionals at their work site and had guest speakers who discussed their career paths and future job opportunities.

“Many of those speakers were really inspirational,” she said. “I remember watching my mother struggle hard in her job to make ends meet and listening to her say, ‘Do you want to struggle all of your life to earn a few dollars? You need to continue your education.’ I knew that I had better get serious and make my education pay off.”

The following two summers, as part of the REACH program, Jessica was placed in a paid internship at Baystate Medical Center. “I really liked the hospital setting and became interested in studying nursing,” she said. “The staff at Pioneer Valley AHEC never gave up on me – even when I wasn’t so sure about myself.”

Today, Jessica is preparing for her junior year in nursing school. “If my friend hadn’t convinced me to attend the REACH program when I was in high school, I don’t know if I would be here today,” she said. “If I had any advice for AHEC students it would be to absorb everything you can so you can be prepared for your future.”

Jessica is employed as a Certified Nurse Assistant at Baystate Medical Center. After graduating and a few years of working, she hopes to return to school to become a nurse practitioner.

“If my friend hadn’t convinced me to attend the REACH program when I was in high school, I don’t know if I would be here today,” she said. “If I had any advice for AHEC students it would be to absorb everything you can so you can be prepared for your future.”

– Jessica Johnson
José Corporan, MPH, PA-C, was six years old when he moved from the Dominican Republic to the U.S. His parents had always wanted him to have a college education, but they struggled with how to afford it.

In 1986, just as he was about to enter high school, José enrolled in the Summer Enrichment Program at Boston AHEC (BAHEC). During the next three years, José matured into a young man with great aspirations in science and health. He became fully invested in learning and wanted to become the first person in his family to go to college. BAHEC provided guidance in the college application and financial aid process, making it possible for him to pursue his education. BAHEC also connected him with a summer career exploration program run by the UMass Medical School’s Office of Outreach Programs where he was motivated to pursue study in public health.

“I honestly don’t believe I would have accomplished what I did without BAHEC,” he said. “The staff was genuine and they always supported me. In fact, I am still in touch with the former director, Sharon Callender. She was a mentor to me.”

Twenty years later, José has earned both undergraduate and graduate degrees from UMass Amherst (BS ’95, MPH ’98) as well as a degree as a physician assistant (Duke University ’05). He fulfilled his family’s dream of receiving a college education, not just one but three times over.

Today, José is employed as a physician assistant at the Suffolk County House of Corrections in Boston. When asked about his future he replied, “I want to teach in a college, but I also want to give back as a mentor and do the same thing BAHEC did for me: help kids get interested in healthcare.”

“I honestly don’t believe I would have accomplished what I did without BAHEC,” he said. “The staff was genuine and they always supported me.” – José Corporan, MPH, PA-C
Continuing the Tradition from One Generation to the Next

Sherilee (Harton) Cordice, BSN, emigrated with her family from Costa Rica to the U.S. when she was a young teenager. She was a shy girl, struggling with the adjustment of fitting into a new environment. But her experience with the Boston AHEC (BAHEC) after school program really built her self confidence.

A 1982 BAHEC graduate, Sherilee remembers the support and encouragement she received for her particular strengths in math and science.

“The classes in math, science and English (at BAHEC) were intensive,” she recalled. “At that time, computers were just becoming available. But we got lots of hands-on experience with them at BAHEC.”

BAHEC continues its tradition of quality programming with classes designed to enhance academic ability, opportunities for interactive hands-on experiences in health care, field trips, dynamic guest speakers and supports for college readiness, delivered in an environment that values mentoring.

“I still remember the field trip we went on to the UMass Medical Center,” Sherilee said. “It really gave me a good close look at what it is like in a hospital.”

In the summer of 1982, BAHEC established a summer internship for Sherilee at the Boston City Hospital (now Boston Medical Center) where she worked preparing slides in the pathology lab with a physician. That fall, she went on to study nursing at Northeastern University. Today she works at Boston City Hospital in the maternity department.

Now, Sherilee’s teen daughter, Ashley Harton Powell, is continuing the tradition. Ashley, who just completed her junior year of high school, participated in the 2008 BAHEC Summer Enrichment Program. She took calculus and advanced placement biology in preparation for college studies in the healthcare or mental health fields.
“While we have an exciting future with the historic signing of the state’s Life Sciences Bill, heralding a new era in life sciences research, we continue to have a shortage of primary care clinicians able to respond to the daily healthcare needs of our citizens.

“By partnering with state agencies, academia, providers and community based organizations, UMass Medical School, Commonwealth Medicine and the MassAHEC Network can create an educated and talented workforce that is ready to work at the laboratory bench as well as the patient bedside.”

— Thomas D. Manning, MA, CAGS
AHEC Becomes a Family Affair for the Ibeabuchi Siblings

Siblings Chikaelo, Chibuzo and Nneka Ibeabuchi all participated in the Boston AHEC (BAHEC) program during high school.

Chibuzo is now a pre-physical therapy major with a minor in psychology, while Chikaelo is settling into a professional career and Nneka is pursuing her doctoral degree in pharmacy.

Chikaelo learned about the BAHEC program during his sophomore year. What began with a summer internship in the Radiology Department at the Boston Medical Center, quickly became a year-round program that lasted until he graduated.

Through BAHEC, he also participated in health education seminars and experiential internships and received assistance with the college preparation and application process. The support, mentoring and encouragement that he received from BAHEC staff and health professionals sparked his own interest in working with youth.

During the summers following his freshman and sophomore years at Boston College, Chikaelo returned to BAHEC to staff the middle school program. During his third summer on staff, he taught a class in health insurance practices and the impact these have on communities.

“That teaching experience shifted my own perspective on how to communicate effectively with my doctor and other healthcare providers,” he said.

He now works as a program manager for public relations at the Bank of New York Mellon, CityACCESS in Boston. The program provides work apprenticeships for high school students from low-income communities at some of Boston’s leading institutions.

“When youth are engaged, supported and motivated by caring adults, and equipped with skills, their success, in my opinion, is limitless,” Chikaelo said.

In 2001, as a high school student at Boston Latin Academy, his sister, Nneka, applied to the Summer Enrichment Program at BAHEC.

She was placed in pharmacy-related internships. These provided hands-on experience in hospital and community settings and prepared her with a broad base of knowledge and skills. Her career interest in pharmacy took off from there. Now she’s a student at Mass College of Pharmacy, pursuing a doctoral degree in Pharmacy with an interest in HIV/AIDS drug therapy.

“I can’t begin to tell you how much BAHEC impacted my life,” Nneka said. “I always mention BAHEC when I talk about my career path. The staff was very supportive and helped me with everything from life issues to college applications.

“They really touch your life in a certain way and let you know that you can really be someone.”
AHEC – A Deciding Point

Inspired by his father, a practicing physician in his native Nigeria, Akanibo Da-Wariboko entered the Boston AHEC (BAHEC) program as a high school freshman in 1999, just a year after emigrating to the U.S.

“I knew I was interested in medicine when I came to BAHEC,” he said. “But I really became aware of public health issues during seminars on the topic of healthcare disparities. That really was a deciding point for me.”

Akanibo was one of the first to serve on the BAHEC Youth Advisory Board, which had a significant impact on planning BAHEC’s programs. This helped him develop communication skills and build self-esteem while preparing him for future leadership positions. BAHEC also placed him in an internship in the pathology lab at Boston Medical Center, where he could shadow health professionals and learn more on-the-job.

Akanibo said the impact of the AHEC program has been significant. He continues working with BAHECs Summer Enrichment Program. He has taught Introduction to Health Careers and Medical Terminology and also works closely with students in a guidance role.

“It’s important to me to give back to other kids what I had myself at BAHEC,” he said.

Akanibo graduated from UMass Amherst. He is studying for the MCAT exam and hopes to enter medical school with plans to pursue a career in pediatric or emergency medicine.

“I knew I was interested in medicine when I came to BAHEC,” he said. “But I really became aware of public health issues during seminars on the topic of healthcare disparities. That really was a deciding point for me.”

– Akanibo Da-Wariboko
The MassAHEC Network is dedicated to building a pipeline of skilled and diverse healthcare workers. Our healthcare recruitment programs expose young people to the many rewarding career opportunities available in the healthcare system.

The baby boom generation often jokes about its career choices: a girl could be a teacher, nurse or homemaker; a boy could be a plumber, an engineer or a doctor. In healthcare today, there are many career options. Understanding what these jobs entail – including the associated educational requirements and recommended career paths – is critical. MassAHEC’s programs offer young people opportunities to explore health careers in hospitals, community health centers, nursing homes, public health settings and in the offices of lawyers, administrators and policy makers.

We start in kindergarten with positive role models of dentists and hygienists during dental screenings. We continue through middle and high school with AHEC staff on campus offering health and career education sessions.

But the competition for limited health professions training slots in colleges and universities is high. Students graduating from high schools with limited resources face additional challenges. MassAHEC’s after school and summer programs offer math, science and English tutorial programs, study skills training and academic advising to strengthen the chance of academic success. And for those students whose parents did not attend college, lack of understanding about the importance of SATs or the intricacies of financial aid applications can also limit access to a college education – MassAHEC helps here too.

MassAHEC also works with high school teachers to seed the future healthcare workforce. Two annual conferences, Frontiers in Science, coordinated by MassAHEC with the UMass Regional Science Resource Center, and Health Care Pathways, provide training materials and resources for science and health education teachers, as well as school nurses and guidance counselors.

Additionally, MassAHEC works with schools to address healthcare disparities. Pittsfield has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates for cities in the Commonwealth. Many efforts over the years have addressed this concern. Barbara Malkas, BS, MS, (DEd in process), deputy school superintendent, was instrumental in leading efforts to work with Berkshire AHEC and move to an evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention curriculum. The program was implemented in Pittsfield’s middle and high schools, with system-wide training for teachers, guidance counselors and health educators. “The staff at Berkshire AHEC are knowledgeable and committed to the health and welfare of the community,” Barbara said.

“As an educator, I appreciate the willingness to really understand the educational context in developing outreach and intervention programs and partnerships. Addressing the health concerns of teenagers has a ripple effect – to their families, their friends and their future.”

First Aid Class – Boston AHEC
Berkshire AHEC

The first Massachusetts AHEC center was established in Pittsfield. Berkshire AHEC still works closely with its initial host, Berkshire Medical Center, and its residency training programs, UMass Medical School student rotations, and continues to serve as a major provider of continuing education for the area.

Boston and BU AHECs

The Carnegie Commission also recognized the need for AHEC programs in congested urban areas. This prompted formation of the Boston AHEC, which is now hosted by the Boston Public Health Commission. Working closely with Boston University’s Schools of Medicine, Dental Medicine and Public Health, the Boston AHEC provides health career exploration opportunities for young people. Boston University’s School of Medicine, a partner from the beginning of the program, continues to support an AHEC office. BUAHEC supports medical student interest groups in primary care and runs a Family Medicine externship program.

Pioneer & Merrimack Valley AHECs

The Pioneer Valley AHEC, once hosted by Springfield Technical Community College, is now supported by the City of Springfield’s Department of Health and Human Services. It continues to work closely with the college on career pipeline programs. The University of Lowell, now UMass Lowell, was once the sponsor of the Merrimack Valley AHEC. The Merrimack Valley AHEC is now integrated with the family medicine residency program and other community health services of the Greater Lawrence Family Health Center – a federally qualified health center, responding to the needs of a culturally diverse region.

Central & Southeastern Massachusetts AHECs

In Worcester County, the Central Massachusetts AHEC has roots dating back to 1982 with Family Health and Social Services Center, now Family Health Center, a federally qualified community health center. This AHEC works with healthcare providers to alleviate health disparities through improved access to care. The AHEC of Southeastern Massachusetts, hosted by Health Care of Southeastern Massachusetts, offers a wide array of cultural competency training and expertise across the south coast and south shore regions, out to the Cape and Islands.

The regions served by each AHEC continue to be medically underserved communities. The MassAHEC Network recognizes the strength of the AHEC centers and the UMass and Boston University medical schools, working together while respecting the mission of each program and the needs of each region. The service areas are fluid and each AHEC develops unique expertise that is leveraged across the state, responding to healthcare workforce challenges and health disparities that do not respect geographic boundaries.
The MassAHEC Network can trace its roots to the landmark 1970 Carnegie Commission on Higher Education report, *Higher Education and the Nation’s Health: Policies for Medical and Dental Education*. The Carnegie Commission found, “The most serious shortages of professional personnel in any major occupation group in the United States are in the healthcare services.”

These shortages were expected to continue through the 1970s, if not into the 1980s. As we all know, these concerns continue today. The Carnegie Commission recommended developing partnerships between university health science centers and community agencies to increase the number of healthcare providers, coordinate the education of healthcare personnel and improve the organization and delivery of healthcare in underserved communities.

In response to the Carnegie report, the federal government passed the Comprehensive Health Manpower Training Act in 1971, providing funding and guidelines for the establishment of Area Health Education Centers (AHECs). These academic-community partnerships were intended to “improve the supply, distribution, diversity and quality of the health workforce and ultimately increase access to healthcare in medically underserved areas.”

The AHECs were envisioned as satellites of the university health science centers, with community hospitals as the nucleus, providing educational programs for aspiring healthcare workers and continuing education programs for physicians and other professionals. The Massachusetts AHEC program was founded in 1978, with the University of Massachusetts Medical School as the primary contractor with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Additional annual support was provided from the state.

Mick Huppert, MPH, provided the program’s leadership from the early beginnings and remains on the Advisory Board to this day. Three decades after our program was founded, we face another healthcare workforce shortage.

UMass Medical School continues to host the central office of the MassAHEC Network and provides leadership and fiscal support. The central office works with the UMass system and state agencies on issues related to primary care and healthcare workforce development.
This anniversary offers an opportunity to reflect on the past and recognize the many AHEC champions who pursued the vision of a skilled, culturally competent, primary care workforce serving the Commonwealth. It also provides the chance to celebrate our achievements and renew our commitment to a healthcare system that is universally accessible and respectful.

The challenges, then as now, are many. We appreciate the persistence of participants, staff and community partners who convert these challenges to opportunities. The stories in this report highlight achievements which could not have been accomplished without you. We also recognize the challenge of leveraging scarce federal and state resources, the generosity of the University of Massachusetts Medical School, and the importance of grants, contracts and in-kind contributions.

We cannot accomplish our goals alone. We collaborate on many levels – nationally with our AHEC colleagues and regionally with state agency partners and statewide organizations. Locally, we work with community agencies, colleagues in our AHEC host sites, teachers and faculty in high schools, colleges and universities, as well as healthcare providers. We build bridges across the divides of culture and language. We coordinate training experiences in rural communities and with the elderly. We partner with physicians, nurses, pharmacists, therapists, community health workers, medical interpreters and others to ensure that our healthcare workforce is well-trained.

Thirty years from now, we may not need the MassAHEC Network. Perhaps we will have enough qualified, competent healthcare workers that reflect the diversity of our communities. Perhaps we will have alleviated health disparities and have a strong public health system. Until that time, thank you for supporting and partnering with the MassAHEC Network.
Sept. 22, 2008

Friends and colleagues:

On behalf of the University of Massachusetts Medical School, I am pleased to offer hearty congratulations to the Massachusetts Area Health Education Center (MassAHEC) Network on its 30 years of dedicated service to the citizens of Massachusetts. In this report, you will read about many of the MassAHEC Network’s accomplishments.

UMass Medical School, the Commonwealth’s only public medical school, became the Massachusetts host site for the federal AHEC program in 1978. Since then, the MassAHEC Network has committed itself to the core mission of the program: improving the quality of healthcare training, encouraging training in primary care and addressing the geographic shortages of healthcare workers.

Since its inception, the MassAHEC Network has reached across the Commonwealth to provide better care to medically underserved communities through partnerships with students, parents, faculty, healthcare providers, clinical preceptors, academic institutions and community-based organizations.

Today, the MassAHEC Network and the UMass Medical School continue this rich tradition by collaborating with the Boston University School of Medicine and six community-based agencies and city health departments, located in Boston, Brockton, Lawrence, Worcester, Springfield and Pittsfield. The MassAHEC Network focuses on eliminating health disparities through community engagement and fostering an ethnically and linguistically diverse, culturally competent life sciences workforce.

In my early years of practice, I had the privilege of participating in an AHEC-associated rotation with Texas Tech University. Personally, I witnessed the critical importance the program plays in addressing health care training and public health concerns. It is through these early experiences with the AHEC program that I am so encouraged by our medical school’s support of the MassAHEC Network. Enthusiastically, I invite you to continue our partnership in this mission, as well as contribute to our new Health Careers Inspiration Fund, a fund that will provide additional resources for this vital program.

The MassAHEC Network’s 30 years of service is a tremendous milestone. In the years ahead, our medical school looks forward to continuing our partnership with the Network to provide the citizens of the Commonwealth with much needed healthcare training and service.

Michael F. Collins, M.D.
Senior Vice President for the Health Sciences Interim Chancellor