

# IFD internship program prepares our future health care leaders

BY FRED HOBBY

As a graduate student in Florida, Roy Hawkins was one of the first participants in the Institute for Diversity in Health Management's (Institute) Summer Enrichment Program (SEP). Through the SEP, Hawkins secured internships at North Shore Medical Center in Miami and Baptist Health South Florida where he gained real-world experience in health care operations and found two mentors who were instrumental in his career.

Two decades later, Hawkins is the deputy director of the James H. Haley Veterans' Hospital and Clinics in Tampa, Fla., — one of the nation's largest Department of Veterans Affairs health care systems serving more than 90,000 veterans. Last summer, he mentored two SEP students at his organization.

"Both students were very professional, eager to learn and hard-working," said Hawkins, who also serves as the president and CEO of the National Association of Health Services Executives and a member of the Institute's board of directors. "Throughout the internship they were exposed to several areas of health care administration, and they made a number of significant contributions to important initiatives taking place at the hospital." Both students were hired full time after their SEP internship.

Since its inception in 1994, the Institute's SEP has provided a pathway to success, for hundreds of minority health care professionals, and many now hold senior leadership positions.

Each year, the program places promising minority graduate students pursuing advanced degrees in health care administration in 10-week internships at hospitals, medical centers, and other organizations for a unique, immersive internship. Experienced administrators serve as mentors providing support and career advice as well as critical and early-career connections.

Main Line Health in Bryn Mawr, Pa., has hosted nearly two dozen SEP interns at its health system since 2005.

"I've watched so many SEP students excel in their internships, move on to exciting employment opportunities, and begin distinguishing themselves in impressive careers in health care," says Main Line Health President and CEO Jack Lynch. "It started with the opportunity to prove themselves and to make connections with established professionals in their field." Lynch also is a member of the Institute's board of directors and chaired the board in 2012.

As part of the SEP, Institute staff screen student applicants and work closely with health care organizations participating in the program to match interns. More than 700 minority graduate students have participated in the SEP, and many former students now hold senior positions in health care organizations.

Meridian Health in Neptune, N.J.,



Hobby

has hosted three SEP interns in its diversity department. Before the internships begin, Meridian Health leaders come up with different opportunities for the students to experience many facets of the health system and work on various projects.

"They become a very valuable member of your team," says Wayne Boatwright, vice president of cultural diversity, and an Institute board member. Because of its positive experience with the SEP, Meridian Health now budgets to host an SEP intern each year.

For Hawkins, his SEP students also helped him learn. He said students often shared information from their graduate studies and webinars that they attended and provided a "fresh eyes" approach to the organization. Hawkins encourages hospital and health system leaders to consider hosting an SEP intern in 2015.

"As a health care field, it is imperative that we prepare the next generation of leaders to ensure that equitable care is provided to all patients and communities," Hawkins said.

Registration for SEP host sites is open. The Institute will match SEP students with host sites beginning in February. Internships generally will take place from June through August.

*Hobby is the president and CEO of the Institute, which is an AHA affiliate. For more information about the SEP, visit [www.diversityconnection.org/SEP](http://www.diversityconnection.org/SEP) or contact Chris Biddle, Institute membership and education specialist at (312) 422-2658 or [cbiddle@aha.org](mailto:cbiddle@aha.org).*



Roy Hawkins (center), deputy director of the James H. Haley Veterans' Hospital and Clinics, is pictured with Loubens Delce (left) and Rodney Suttles (right). Delce and Suttles were SEP Interns last year and hired by the hospital after their internship.