Thomas P. Ference
Health System Simulation

As the pace of change in healthcare continues to accelerate, managers must be leaders, adept at navigating the changing marketplace, and legal/regulatory and clinical worlds. The objective of the Thomas P. Ference Health System Simulation is to provide an opportunity to experience the challenges of executive leadership and strategic decision-making of a competitive multi-hospital marketplace. This is a realistic exercise that effectively simulates the complexity and intensity of the evolving hospital environment.

HOW IT WORKS

Participants collaborate in this comprehensive strategic exercise as the executive leadership team of a community hospital. As hospital executives, they must analyze their institution’s overall strategic direction and make all decisions central to its successful operation including mission/vision, service line mix, capacity, investment in quality (professional/clinical, systems, etc.), patient/payer mix, marketing, staffing, financial structure, and so on.

A typical “run” of the simulation involves four teams strategically guiding their hospitals through a competitive marketplace. Teams submit decisions for each operating cycle simultaneously and receive prompt feedback on their hospital’s performance in the context of its competitors and then proceed to prepare decisions for the next operating cycle. The simulation exercise usually involves six full operating cycles and takes roughly an evening and two days, including supporting instructional modules, strategic financial analysis, and feedback/discussion sessions.

“This simulation training exercise is as close to real life as I’ve ever seen. It replicates the implications and complexities associated with managing a complex hospital environment. In addition to the intricate lessons of decision-making and resource allocation, participants are enveloped into the competitiveness and team interaction aspects of human behavior that are also essential elements of success in this ever changing and dynamic system of healthcare delivery.”

—Michael Maron, President/CEO, Holy Name Medical Center
WHY A SIMULATION?

Simulations are a well-tested and effective means of instruction that have been employed in management education within business schools and industry since the late 1950s. They range from simple exercises such as in-baskets to comprehensive exercises in functional areas including marketing, finance and operations to complex total organizational models such as the Thomas P. Ference Health System Simulation.

The Health System Simulation which involves developing and implementing overall institutional strategy, is offered by the Mailman School of Public Health. The simulation evaluations reflect the consensus that participants find simulations to be the most powerful learning activities they have experienced. Follow-up studies and surveys reinforce this, particularly with regard to improved strategic decision-making “on-the-job” and teamwork and leadership competencies.

HOW WAS THIS DEVELOPED?

Custom-designed for the healthcare sector, the concept and working model for the Health System Simulation was developed by a team from Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health led by Professors Thomas P. Ference, Ralph Sabatino, and faculty and alumni serving in hospital executive roles. The team worked in consultation with Business Learning International (BLI), the leading simulation developer, whose clients include IBM, Nokia, and others.

CAN ANYONE ENROLL IN THE THOMAS P. FERENCE HEALTH SYSTEM SIMULATION?

The Health System Simulation is available as a stand-alone workshop, a component of a larger program for individuals and groups working in hospitals and clinical facilities internationally or as a custom program. It has been used as a module in leadership development programs and as training for department chairs, hospital management teams, other providers or as a public or open workshop program for individual professionals.

The Health System Simulation is also a valuable instructional component of the Mailman School’s Health Policy and Management curricula and an integral element of its Master’s, Executive, and part-time programs in public health.

This program has also been held off-campus, as an executive leadership program, most recently with senior staff, trustees and doctors from AHA, Barnabas Health, Bellevue, Cedars Sinai, Holy Name Medical Center, NewYork-Presbyterian, Northwell, Memorial Sloan Kettering, and Mount Sinai Health System.

“...The team building portions of this simulation helped me to better articulate my intuitive team building skills—I know that this experience will help me in all of my endeavors as each area of work only thrives in an environment that nurtures resilient productive teams. The complex decision making was probably the best part of the simulation for me. In the past I have engaged in problem solving by looking at each issue in isolation instead of thinking about factor analysis—analyzing how each decision will impact all the other areas of operation. The impact of marketing is an area that I understood pretty well and I was not particularly surprised by the emphasis the simulation placed on that aspect.”
—David P. Roye
St. Giles Professor, Pediatric Orthopedic Surgery, Columbia University
CMO, Children of China Pediatrics Foundation
President and CEO
International Healthcare Leadership.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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