Improved Faculty Quality of Life Essential to Productivity at American Medical Centers

Six Principles for Change to Stimulate Creativity and Productivity

SALT LAKE CITY—Academic medical centers (AMCs) must make systematic changes to improve quality of life—and thus productivity—of their faculty, according to a commentary that will appear in the October 12 issue of Science Translational Medicine. The commentary, co-authored by Mary C. Beckerle, Ph.D., chief executive officer and director of Huntsman Cancer Institute at the University of Utah, suggests six strategies to achieve these changes.

Faculty members of AMCs have duties that include performing biomedical research; educating future health care providers; delivering state-of-the-art health care; and contributing to policy development, peer review, and community education. And yet, according to the authors, relatively little attention is paid to factors that would improve faculty members’ professional satisfaction. The authors point to a recent survey that found high levels of anxiety, depression, and job dissatisfaction among more than 2000 medical school faculty at various private and public institutions in the United States.

“To succeed at the vital work they perform, AMCs must recruit, retain and develop talented people in a climate that stimulates creativity and productivity,” said Beckerle. “For this to
happen, organizations must pay more attention to enhancing professional development for their faculty members, both present and future.”

Referencing Homer’s *Odyssey*, the authors propose six strategies they call “the Nepenthe principles” (In the Greek classic, nepenthe is an antidote to suffering.):

- Value the contributions of both individuals and teams
- Nurture the young
- Integrate the personal and the professional
- Create inclusive communities
- Develop enlightened leadership
- Emphasize service

“Although this seems like common sense, many challenges in the prevailing AMC culture keep these changes from being implemented,” said Hannah Valantine, M.D., Senior Associate Dean in Leadership and Diversity at Stanford University School of Medicine and one of the coauthors. “For example, some have expressed concerns that being more inclusive will mean lowering standards of excellence. Others believe that professional success actually requires the sacrifice of personal life.”

Another co-author, Dena Towner, M.D., Director, Prenatal Diagnosis and Chief of the Division of Maternal Fetal Medicine at the University of California, Davis, adds, “Adoption of the Nepenthe principles as core values will support positive transformation of our institutions. It will require financial resources, time, and the discomfort of change, but the benefits of enhanced faculty recruitment, retention and productive scholarship will greatly outweigh these costs.”

Along with Beckerle, Valantine, and Towner, the commentary’s seven co-authors include Kathryn L. Reed, M.D., University of Arizona; Mary Ann Shafer, M.D., University of California
The mission of Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI) at The University of Utah is to understand cancer from its beginnings, to use that knowledge in the creation and improvement of cancer treatments, to relieve the suffering of cancer patients, and to provide education about cancer risk, prevention, and care. HCI is a National Cancer Institute-designated cancer center, which means that it meets the highest national standards for cancer care and research and receives support for its scientific endeavors. HCI is also a member of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) a not-for-profit alliance of the world’s leading cancer centers, which is dedicated to improving the quality and effectiveness of care provided to patients with cancer. For more information about HCI, please visit www.huntsmancancer.org.