What will society need from physicians over the next 20 to 30 years?

In 1994, the OHSU School of Medicine answered that question by implementing a redesign of our M.D. curriculum. Our focus on what was then a cutting-edge approach to education earned us a national reputation, and helped support Oregon’s physician workforce needs.

Over the past two decades, the health care landscape has evolved and now is doing so at an ever-faster pace: reform, team-based health care, personalized medicine derived from unique genetic profiles, and an explosion of information technology – from smart phones to the electronic health record.

The time is right to ask the same question: What will society need from physicians over the next 20 to 30 years? To answer the question, the OHSU School of Medicine has boldly embarked on an exciting initiative to transform our M.D. curriculum.

Broadly, our goal is to prepare physicians to be leaders in a health care delivery and discovery environment that is rapidly changing – and likely to continue evolving under any future scenario.

The new curriculum – YOUR M.D. – will build on and expand the strengths of our current curriculum, enhance our commitment to Oregon’s rural and underserved communities, and ensure OHSU continues to educate and graduate the types of physicians most needed by Oregon.

YOUR M.D. will embrace innovative new teaching methods, emphasizing 21st century skills related to health care quality, genetics, interprofessional teamwork, data interpretation, technology, costs and more.

Our students will advance through customized learning plans, allowing some students to complete medical school at an accelerated pace.

Our program will create lifelong learners, adaptable to an always-evolving health care environment and ready to provide the highest quality care for patients, communities and populations.

Together, we are imagining the physician of the mid-21st century. Together, we are developing a curriculum to educate this future physician. Together, we are changing the future of health.

“Let’s begin with the end product in mind – the ideal physician of the mid-21st century – and reverse engineer our education programs to achieve that goal. We can take what is unique about Oregon and the School of Medicine and incorporate that into an innovative new curriculum.”

Mark Richardson, M.D., MBA, Dean
Frequently asked questions

Why transform our M.D. curriculum? The health care landscape is changing. Our goal is to boldly and innovatively bridge the growing divide between how physicians are trained and the needs of society in this future landscape.

How is the health care landscape changing? Reform, changing delivery models, integration of new treatments (such as those stemming from genetics advances), the push to contain costs and a new focus on prevention and wellness are among several accelerating trends. Simultaneously, an explosion of information technology and tools is transforming both health care and education at all levels.

At its broadest level, what is the purpose of the initiative? The M.D. Curriculum Transformation process is ensuring that OHSU continues to educate and graduate the types of physicians needed by Oregon – across discipline, geography, patient population, cultural competency, and attributes linked to an ability to provide high quality health care and community leadership in the evolving future health care landscape.

Is there something wrong with the existing M.D. curriculum? No. The current curriculum is strong and produces exceptional graduates. However, in this rapidly changing environment, our responsibility is to look forward and ask what society will need from us in the future, to imagine the future, and to help create it. This initiative builds on our existing strong curriculum and ensures our graduates are aligned with the health care trajectory.

Has OHSU ever undertaken this type of curriculum revision before? Yes. In 1994, the School of Medicine created and implemented a revision of our M.D. curriculum. At that time, we took unique aspects of OHSU and Oregon and made them part of the then-new curriculum. We are taking those same steps now.

Are other medical schools doing this too? Many, if not most, medical schools across the country are in some phase of curriculum transformation. Like OHSU, the community of academic medicine acknowledges and embraces its leadership role on this topic.

What do our students think of this initiative? Students – like all of us – understand that our health care systems are changing. Student input is being provided through a number of channels. We’re also seeking input from recent graduates, who provide a unique and timely perspective on their educational experience.

Is curriculum transformation linked to the new Collaborative Life Sciences Building? No. The Curriculum Transformation initiative would take place without the CLSB. However, the new building provides an important

Rising on the waterfront: OHSU/OUS Collaborative Life Sciences Building
opportunity to consider our future curriculum with this state-of-the-art facility in mind.

What is the timeline? We intend to implement the first year of YOUR M.D. with the M.D. class entering in 2014. Full implementation will require four years. Enhancements to the clinical experiences (what we now call clerkships) will begin in January 2016.

OHSU is nationally known for primary care education. Will that change? No. Throughout this change process, our commitment to primary care, rural Oregon and underserved communities will be – as it has always been – unshakable. A transformed M.D. curriculum will enhance that commitment by identifying new and innovative educational opportunities for students to focus on underserved communities.

Have themes already emerged that are guiding the transformation initiative? Yes. Three themes have emerged that permeate most aspects of the curriculum. First, the new curriculum will be competency-based, not time-based, with an educational program customized to each student. This means some students – such as a student who is already a physician assistant – may complete medical school in less than four years. Second, the health care landscape of the future will be data-driven (patient panel/population analyses, genetic sequencing, costs control, for example) and the new curriculum will include a focus on related skills sets, such as informatics. Third, YOUR M.D. will produce graduates skilled at self-assessment and able to continually advance their own expertise, allowing them to lead health care into a new era of continuous improvement.

I want to participate. How can I find out more? Our website, www.ohsu.edu/newcurriculum, is full of information for our community partners and others interested in this process. Please also email the School of Medicine Dean’s office anytime with questions or comments at somdeansoffice@ohsu.edu.

“I believe OHSU and Oregon have the people, the willingness and the talent to create lightning in a bottle, to build an innovative educational program aligned to the future landscape of health thereby enhancing our ability to address the health care needs of our state and region.”

George Mejicano, M.D., Senior Associate Dean for Education