

## Workforce Summit 2008: Convening Leaders, Confronting Reality

This special section is designed to let you catch up on what you may have missed at last week's Workforce Summit 2008 at the San Diego Convention Center. Over 400 regional leaders across public and private sectors met to hear viewpoints and discuss answers to challenges that face our regional workforce. Here we capture the high points. For in-depth coverage, visit [www.SanDiegoAtWork.com](http://www.SanDiegoAtWork.com) and click the blue Summit banner at the top of the page. A sincere thanks to our many sponsors.

### The Healthcare Workforce Crisis: Leaders See Better Collaboration as the Key to a Solution

By Janet Höff, Regional Allied Health and Science Initiative

"We have to sit down side by side.... We need to have our listening ears on," said Margie Fritch, dean of Health Sciences and Public Service at San Diego Mesa College, during the Workforce Summit breakout session *A Crisis in Healthcare: Building a Workforce*. "If we [educators and healthcare providers] do not sit down and look at this together, things are just going to get worse."

Fritch and other healthcare leaders from the San Diego community were confronting top issues of concern around the healthcare workforce crisis. At the top of their agenda are the lack of qualified, diverse healthcare professionals in the workforce; a shortage of faculty to prepare individuals to enter the health workforce; and the critical need for collaboration between all stakeholders.

"California hospitals are really unable to meet the current or projected demand, as we know it, for nurses, doctors, and specialists, and the so-called Allied Health professions, such as pharmacists, clinical laboratory, respiratory therapy, and radiological therapy," said Steven Escoboza, president and CEO of the Hospital Association of San Diego and Imperial Counties.

"Nearly all healthcare categories across the board are experiencing shortages." That, he warned, will only be exacerbated by the country's booming aging population, California's own population growth, and proposed federal and state funding cuts.

Session attendee Michael Lacourse, dean of the National University School of Health and Human Services, said, "There is not a shortage of qualified, interested people. The problem is that the pipeline gets broken down [because of a lack of] access to faculty and clinical placements."

Healthcare providers and educational institutions,

including K-12, community college, and university systems, are each attempting to solve the healthcare workforce shortage in San Diego County.

"However," said Bob Yarris, former director of the Regional Health Occupations Resource Center, "we don't have a lot of bridges going between both entities. We've attempted to do that but not very successfully so that we could say 'we're addressing this crisis aggressively.'" His comment illustrated the final consensus of the session: Create more partnerships.

Margie Fritch said, "It is going to take collaboration..., new knowledge..., new thinking..., financial resources, and it is going to take human resources."

She added that education and provider systems operate very differently, but, if we are really going to solve the healthcare workforce crisis, it will take very creative individuals sitting down and deciding. "We want to do this together." With all the expertise in this region, we can pull our collective minds together and say, "if this is important, we are willing to sit down and we are all going to compromise," she said.

If collaboration is the key, the San Diego Workforce Partnership may have a solution. Bob Yarris explained: "The intent of this organization is to...begin dialogue between industry providers and healthcare educators." By creating a San Diego Regional Center for Healthcare Workforce Development, a collaborative body of community stakeholders can create workforce solutions that work for both education and the healthcare industry, he added.

Sid Voorakkara, Senior Program Officer of the California Endowment summarized, "Everyone in this room has an important part to play in the healthcare education crisis. Where we want to go is to see the crisis as an opportunity."