

# health policy and management

## management policy advisor

### A TRUE TALE

Although a college aptitude test helped direct Janet Porter, PhD, to a health management career, she says her parents' examples also played key roles in her choice of a career. "My mother is a nurse and my father was in management. So it was natural that I became interested in hospital administration." Dr. Porter earned both her bachelor's degree and master's in health administration (MHA) from Ohio State University. In 1985, she received an MBA from the University of Minnesota. "It was only on completion of all three degrees," says Dr. Porter "that I was satisfied that I had a set of tools powerful and versatile enough to tackle a career in health administration — in any setting."



Janet Porter, PhD

In 1988, Dr. Porter joined the Children's Hospital of Columbus, Ohio, as its Chief Operating Officer, a position she held for 10 years. According to Dr. Porter, that position exemplified one of the many ways hospitals work under the public health umbrella, often in concert with local health departments. During that time she earned a PhD in Health Policy, Research and Administration. After several more career moves, she took a position in 2000 as Associate Dean of Executive Education at the University of North Carolina School of Public Health (UNCSPH). "There are times when I miss hospital work," says Dr. Porter, "and especially working with children. But I do love my current work."

A major component of her job as Associate Dean is new business development, which includes bringing large projects to the school directed towards developing public health managers, leaders and the workforce at large. Dr. Porter marshals the resources for the grants as well. "Our most recent grant involves a feasibility study for a patient safety improvement corps. Prevention of patient injury, through early and appropriate response to evident and potential problems, is the key to patient safety." Dr. Porter also serves as Project Director for the Management Academy for Public Health.



### Management Policy Advisor Checkpoint

Do you have an interest in and an understanding of the financial side of health care?

Would you enjoy managing a group of people and developing team rapport?

Do you want to become involved in the work of all departments of your institute, organization, school or company?

*If so, read on*



*“Administrators wear many hats, which, for me, is one of the many reasons this job is such a pleasure.”*

Janet Porter,  
PhD

## Profiling the job

Health administration in the public arena consists of government work at the federal, state or local levels, at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and National Institutes of Health (NIH), and state and municipal health departments. Competent and resourceful administrators are in high demand, especially in the high-pressure world of public hospitals. The private sector includes hospitals as well, group practices and institutions, non-profit associations such as the Red Cross, and pharmaceutical and insurance companies. Some public administrators often work with medical supply companies and with dot-com companies, where, for example, they develop software packages to improve the scheduling of patients in clinics.

Careers in health administration’s public sector usually require an MPH. In the private sector, a master’s in health administration (MHA) or master’s in business administration (MBA) are useful components of any health administrator’s educational portfolio. As hospitals, both public and private, have grown in size, merged and become increasingly complex, the curricula in MHA and MBA programs have grown more similar.

Health care administration engenders tremendous responsibilities. Management of human resources, encompassing such duties as determining personnel needs, recruiting, hiring and orienting new hires, is one of the most important responsibilities. “You need to be a coach and encourage your employees to show individual initiative and work together as a team,” says Dr. Porter. “It’s a task that requires no small degree of interpersonal finesse.” Planning and budgeting is another area of central responsibility. Adequate revenue must be maintained, expenses balanced, and staff must have access to the right equipment and supplies in sufficient quantity. All administrators, health or otherwise, must understand how to build and utilize good computer databases of information. While information technology is essential



for the running of any business, Dr. Porter says, it is doubly so for the health care field, particularly in hospitals, which rely so heavily on up-to-the-minute laboratory values, patient records, billing and scheduling.

### The Management Academy

The Management Academy for Public Health at UNCSPH, a joint project between the School of Public Health and the Kenan-Flagler Business School, is designed to educate public health professionals who have moved into essential management jobs, but have little or no formal management training. “We developed what is called the ‘National Demonstration Project’ to try to determine if there is a way to take middle managers, public health professionals in their 30s, 40s and 50s, and teach them a series of skills to optimize their effectiveness in public health administration. Our task is to develop significant management skills in 600 people over a three-year time period.” The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention sponsor the Academy.

Students at the Academy, most of whom work in public health departments and hospitals around the country, remain in their current jobs, spending the equivalent of 20 days in executive education. The “students” spend five days on the Chapel Hill campus and then return home to do most of their course work through distance learning. They are on campus in August and November and then graduate in May. “We recruit and train them in teams,” Dr. Porter says. “They apply as a group, they are selected as a group and they attend as a group.” Such team training helps the participants understand the responsibilities of different disciplines and helps them to apply and sustain their management skills back in the workplace.

### A day in the life

After she completed graduate school, Janet Porter’s first job was with an inner city hospital. “I was the evening administrator, which meant that I was the person in charge from 6:00pm to 2:00am,” she recalls. “If a mental health patient had a violent episode and the situation needed to be dealt with, I was in charge. If our laundry supervisor was accused of stealing laundry, I had to handle it. If the ER called to report that a gang member had been shot and the rest of the gang was filling the waiting room, I had to decide what to do.” It was a job that required strong managerial instincts,



**Did you know?**  
In a September 2001 study, The Center for Studying Health System Change (HSC) showed that hospital costs accounted for the largest portion of medical cost increases in 2000, at an estimated 43 percent.<sup>1</sup>



**Did you know?**  
In the year 2000 alone, hospitals provided approximately \$21.6 billion of uncompensated care.<sup>2</sup>

she says, and a willingness to act on the spot — “to say ‘this is what we’re going to do right now.’”

These days, Dr. Porter isn’t ordinarily called upon to make quick life-or-death decisions. But the management skills she honed in her first job have stood her in good stead at UNCSPH, where she divides her time between her duties as Associate Dean and faculty member.

“On any given day, you’ll probably find me teaching — my students are candidates for either MPH or MHA degrees or, in some cases, working on a master’s in science and public health,” she says. “I might also schedule a meeting with a student who needs career counseling or advice on a job offer.” Dr. Porter devotes several hours a week to training programs, such as the Management Academy or the Public Health Leadership Institute. “As one of several business plan coaches, I supported the Lenowisco County Health Department in Virginia in the development of a collaborative program to develop a water treatment plan for a former coal camp,” says Dr. Porter. “Helping students in this capacity is a very rewarding aspect of my job.”

As faculty director of the web-based UNCSPH Certificate Program, she spends time with other faculty colleagues discussing and implementing distance learning courses and curricula. “And, of course, there are the inevitable planning meetings, especially if we’re in the middle of writing a grant proposal.”

At every stage of her career, Dr. Porter has been energized by the scope and variety of her experiences. “I think one of the best reasons to be in public health management or administration is the range of tasks you do from day to day,” she says. “Depending on where they practice, health administrators may have conferences with a city council, hold meetings with disgruntled employees, cooperate with the police, and deliver lectures at speaking engagements.” And her current job? “Being an Associate Dean is enormously challenging and stimulating,” she says. “And getting to see my students move on to their own careers in public health is a special reward.”

# career at a glance



## Janet Porter, PhD

- 2000–Present **Associate Dean** Executive Education, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- 1998–2000 **Director** Executive Education, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- 1998–1999 **Interim President and CEO** Association of University Programs in Health Administration (AUPHA), Washington, D.C.
- 1997 **CEO** Methodist Women's and Children's Hospital, San Antonio, Texas
- 1988–1997 **Chief Operating Officer** Children's Hospital and Executive Director, Children's Hospital Research Foundation, Columbus, Ohio
- 1988–1989 **Associate Executive Director** Children's Hospital
- 1987–1988 **Executive Consultant** The Lash Group, Washington, D.C.
- 1982–1987 **Instructor and Admissions Coordinator** Graduate Program, Hospital and Health Services Administration, University of Minnesota
- 1979–1982 **Assistant Executive Director** Children's Hospital, Columbus, Ohio
- 1977–1979 **Evening Administrator and Director of Government Relations** Saint Mary of Nazareth Medical Center, Chicago, Illinois

1 [http://bcbshealthissues.com/issues/healthcarecosts/?PROACTIVE\\_ID=cefcfccdc9cccecac](http://bcbshealthissues.com/issues/healthcarecosts/?PROACTIVE_ID=cefcfccdc9cccecac)

2 [http://bcbshealthissues.com/issues/healthcarecosts/?PROACTIVE\\_ID=cefcfccdc9cccecac](http://bcbshealthissues.com/issues/healthcarecosts/?PROACTIVE_ID=cefcfccdc9cccecac)