

# PERSPECTIVE



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As the world continues on its path of increasing interdependency, the need to partner internationally becomes even more compelling. A recent AAHC survey of domestic and international members was striking in describing the parallels among

our members in regard to changes taking place at their institutions. The findings were similar for most items surveyed, including expansion of clinical practices, mergers and consolidations, changes in governance structure and/or reporting relationships, and expanding or opening a new campus or health professions school.

Other findings suggest that international members are less likely to be free-standing health sciences universities than U.S. members, and that a common governance structure for the various health professions schools in an academic health center is more likely to occur in the U.S. Additionally, dental schools and schools of public health appear to be more prevalent among our international members. One noteworthy difference is that U.S. members reported having more cost-reduction initiatives. International members reported being most active in Asia, North America, and Europe, while U.S. members noted they were most active in Asia, Central and South America, and Sub-Saharan Africa. This, no doubt, will change as significant programmatic growth appears likely on a worldwide basis.

In this issue, three geographically distinct institutions—located in Africa, North America, and Southeast Asia—describe the role that international partnerships play in their setting. At MountCrest University College in Kanda-Accra, Ghana, Dr. Samuel Akor describes productive relationships with a number of institutions that support needs for leadership capacity and skill development while reciprocally providing enhanced knowledge of unique regional medical conditions. Dr. Joseph Kolars from the University of Michigan, outlines the benefits of international partnerships and the importance of focusing on “win/win” strategies. Dr. Ratna Sitompul of the Universitas Indonesia summarizes many benefits of partnerships, including capacity-building and the value of student and faculty exchanges. She notes how partnerships can help offer a wide variety of solutions.

It is abundantly clear that globalization impacts virtually every sector that affects the academic health center. As such, leaders must strategize regionally and globally. The growth of our international arm suggests to me that—working together—academic health centers will have even greater success in improving health and well-being worldwide.

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## LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVES

### International Partnerships and Collaboration



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For our college, one of the benefits of international partnerships is gaining assistance in enriching our curriculum. We currently have partnerships with several institutions and are working to develop other international partnerships.

For example, our work with The Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine has a strong focus on humanistic medicine, in which the founder of our university has been interested, and we are developing our capacity in that area. One of our faculty members is currently working and studying simulation and emergency medicine at Penn State. She will share the expertise she gains there with colleagues here on her return to Ghana. Her networking is likely to lead to the building of bridges and collaborative partnerships, for which such linkages are intended.

We also look to international partnerships to help us develop the capacity of the faculty whom we have assembled, especially for the first two years of medical education. For example, I have had some exposure to problem-based learning, and we are bringing that on board here. Our colleagues at Penn State are doing the same thing and are also engaged with other active learning approaches, such as team-based learning. We recently met with them to further exchange ideas and learn from one another.

International partnerships help us to crossbreed ideas. As we develop our medical school, we want our faculty and students to benefit from knowledge about clinical conditions that we do not regularly see in Ghana. Exchanges of faculty and staff with other institutions can provide that kind of exposure, while concurrently giving faculty and staff who come to our campus knowledge about clinical conditions with which they might not be familiar. Consider Ebola, for example—encountering that disease in a clinical setting can help those unfamiliar with it to recognize its symptoms. Exchanges providing that kind of knowledge help improve global health.

I also see international partnerships as a way to build leadership capacity. Leadership skills—particularly in the areas of global health and public health—are urgently needed across West Africa. To build that institutional capacity, we need to enhance the training of future leaders among medical personnel. Overall, we want to collaborate to improve the quality and outcomes of medical education. It is my hope that we continue to collaborate with international partners who can help us advance toward that goal.



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**Joseph C. Kolars, MD** // *Senior Associate Dean, Education and Global Initiatives* University of Michigan Medical School

At the University of Michigan, much of our work in international partnerships can be framed in the context of an intentionally-designed set of platforms. Platforms cross at least two of our academic missions, most commonly education and research, and involve more than one department.

We have committed considerable energy to six such platforms. In Beijing, the Joint Institute for Translational and Clinical Research is a partnership between the University of Michigan Health System and Peking University Health Sciences Center. Work in Ghana focuses on child and maternal health and other disciplines. In Ethiopia, we collaborate with the Health Ministry and St. Paul’s Hospital Millennium Medical College. A fourth partnership is with the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi. A fifth is with the University of Brazil. We also partner with two institutions in Israel, the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology and the Weizmann Institute of Science.

The benefits are several-fold. As a public institution, we believe strongly that we should take on difficult social problems. That’s what a great university does. We also see a clear benefit in addressing problems globally that lend themselves to the kind of scientific bandwidth we are able to offer. In that spirit, international initiatives help us advance our mission.

There is much we can learn from international partnerships. By necessity, innovation and discovery occur differently in low-resource settings than in settings with abundant resources. The leadership here at the University of Michigan believes that disruption—the creative innovations of the future—will rise from work in low-resource settings. There is much to learn from observing how science and research are conducted where resources are constrained.

Moreover, international partnerships provide natural opportunities for us to collaborate across disciplines. Such initiatives create powerful venues for our researchers to interact with each other in new ways. Yet another benefit is that international partnerships cultivate growth and development across our community of students, trainees, and faculty—many of whom value study and work abroad.



I think opportunities for partnerships will continue to expand, especially as our global partners become more sophisticated in terms of what they look for from collaborations. Going forward, it is important to focus on structuring relationships in “win/win” ways.

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**Ratna Sitompul, MD, PhD** // *Dean, Faculty of Medicine*  
Universitas Indonesia

Universitas Indonesia engages in many relationships with institutions worldwide. Our partnerships focus in three areas: education, healthcare, and research. In education, we have collaborations with the University of Melbourne, Monash University in Australia, and Newcastle University in the United Kingdom, where we send students for exchange programs. We also have collaborations with Kobe University, The Erasmus University Medical Center, and Utrecht University for empowering our staffs’ education. In healthcare, our collaborations include the National University of Singapore. For research, an example of collaboration includes Leiden University to investigate the role of infection from birth to two years of life.

We apply inter-professional education with a multidisciplinary approach and challenge our students in several levels of urban and rural healthcare settings. One of our approaches is partnership with nine national teaching hospitals and Jakarta Health Service to stimulate collaboration and improve the medical education system to support national education and solve health problems. This partnership serves as a model for unity in education, research, and health services, while supporting the government in national health policy development and health financing.

Collaborations can help us build on this capacity. We benefit from international partnerships in the influx of students and researchers who come to Universitas Indonesia to study and conduct research. These visitors enrich the life and work of our university and help to establish benchmarks. Internationally, we work with institutions to develop advanced medical science and technology toward better solutions for Indonesia’s health and medical care.

We consider research to be a significant factor in raising the quality of teaching. We have developed our research facilities and infrastructure, such as the *Medical Education and Research Centre* (MERC) and *Indonesia Innovation for Health*, to become a pioneer in medical science. Our partnerships with industries, universities, and clinical research institutions have resulted in several research clusters—in infectious disease and immunology, human reproduction, medical technology, clinical trials and drug development, and stem cell-tissue engineering—to generate focused research for international publication.

As an academic health system, Universitas Indonesia and MERC can take part in improving our national health system. Integrated collaborations and partnerships play an important role in our vision for a better and healthier Indonesia.



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