

A Bright FUTURE

New institute links hospitality, design, and health administration to improve patient care



Above: Verma, Hollis, and Shepley (l-r) lead the new institute, blending their expertise in hospitality, health administration, and design. Right: Cornell design students help Weill Cornell rethink the layout of its neurological intensive care unit.



To address challenges

of modern health care, the College of Human Ecology and the School of Hotel Administration have launched the Cornell Institute for Healthy Futures. Billed as the first such academic center in the country, IHF combines hospitality, environmental design, and health policy and management into a broad-based platform to improve service in health care, wellness, and senior living through industry partnerships.

“What has never been done before is the integration of these disciplines to promote a holistic view of health care,” says executive director Rohit Verma, who teaches service operations management at the School of Hotel Administration. “The institute will focus not only on clinical care, but will pay close attention to the patient experience, the well-being of the family, and the

long-term emotional needs of patients and their loved ones, all carefully informed by a design perspective. That’s what makes us unique.”

At a Nov. 2 kickoff event, IHF will host panel discussions with speakers from industry and academia on research needs related to health care, hospitality, and design. In April 2016, IHF plans to host an inaugural roundtable on core issues shared by hospitality and health care.

“The institute’s approach is more than interdisciplinary,” says associate director Mardelle McCuskey Shepley, professor of design and environmental analysis. “It’s transdisciplinary, in the sense that it’s generating a whole new field, rather than having different disciplines work in parallel. We hope this venture will broaden perspectives regarding the future of health, and enhance the quality of people’s lives.”

This fall, institute leaders are forming partnerships, establishing fellowships for practitioners and researchers, and identifying potential visiting scholars. Working closely with stakeholders in both colleges, they are investigating research funding opportunities, which will help determine future collaborations. Current projects include studying the role of service and hospitality in patient choice, understanding customer preferences in wellness tourism, and assessing the performance of wellness-themed hotels.

To fulfill its educational mission, the institute has developed a preliminary list of Human Ecology courses to complement Hotel School offerings, and has considered creating an undergraduate concentration and a dual-degree masters program. Directors plan to coordinate support to Cornell instructors teaching courses

in health care and wellness, and expand outreach efforts to undergrads considering careers in design, hospitality, or health administration.

“There’s a lot of overlap between disciplines,” says Brooke Hollis, Sloan ’78, Sloan Program in Health Administration associate director. “However, historically, health care institutions have not matched the hospitality industry’s effort toward operational and customer-service tasks. Now, as more ideas from hospitality are being considered or adopted by the health care industry, and with more research on effective management and design interventions, we’re beginning to see some promising improvements. It’s an exciting time, and with the new institute, we hope to be innovators and thought leaders in these areas.”

— *Kenny Berkowitz*