The University of Minnesota has positioned itself to be a leader in the burgeoning field of health informatics through formation of the University Partnership for Health Informatics (UP-HI), a consortium funded with a historic $5.1 million training grant awarded to the University of Minnesota Institute for Health Informatics under the leadership of School of Nursing professor Julie Jacko, PhD, who serves as principal investigator and project director. The University is one of only nine U.S. institutions awarded stimulus funds for university-based training by the Office of the National Coordinator for the Health Information Technology as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

**ADVANCING THE USE OF HEALTH IT**

UP-HI brings together the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, the College of St. Scholastica, and the University of Minnesota-Crookston. The three consortium members will collaborate to educate new professionals in health informatics and advance meaningful use of health information technology. While recent health reform laws now require all health providers to have electronic health records (EHRs) in place by 2015, EHRs are just one high-profile tool within health informatics.

“Electronic records are an important piece of the puzzle, but health informatics is so much broader,” says Bonnie Westra, PhD, RN, FAAN, School of Nursing associate professor and UP-HI co-principal investigator. “Informatics is really the use of technology to enhance our health information. We’re taking a closer look at the kind of patient information we are asking for and after capturing it, using it for wide-ranging purposes, while still respecting privacy and security concerns. For example, informatics makes possible the sharing of patient information with public health experts to take a closer look at the health of populations, an exciting and critical development in the management of potential pandemics.”

**TRANSCEENDING ROLES**

“UP-HI transcends the roles of any particular school in this partnership,” says Jacko. “Each of the three partners has brought ideal solutions to the table for advancing the education of these health professionals. The UP-HI consortium has been richly architected so that the whole of our efforts is greater than our individual parts.”

The University of Minnesota has been a leader in health informatics for nearly 40 years, offering graduate degrees in the field through the Department of Laboratory Science and Pathology in the Medical School. Last year, that program was transferred to the Institute for Health Informatics, an institute of the University of Minnesota’s Academic Health Center, making education available in this specialty area to professional in other fields – from the health sciences to engineering to computer science.

The two other UP-HI partners are also known for their informatics expertise. The College of St. Scholastica has a national reputation for its health information management programs and exceptional online course delivery. And UMC is the only campus within the University system to offer an undergraduate degree program in software engineering.
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP
An exciting development of this grant is the creation of a Community Partnership Council. “Our council partners represent the best in healthcare today and are helping us develop curricula, provide mentorship for students, and create work context immersion experiences to enhance their professional development,” Jacko says. “UP-HI partners are also helping with critical student recruitment and work placement opportunities for graduates. These partnerships are a testimony to the strong relationships we’ve built within the community.”

Andrew Nelson, executive director of HealthPartners Research Foundation, calls the council “absolutely vital” to UP-HI’s success. “The council is unique because the community has been invited to help identify workforce needs and to help shape the intellectual value and direction of the curricula. This is a genuine partnership, which will be important for the future of healthcare delivery in America,” Nelson says.

A VARIETY OF ROLES
A key factor to the grant’s success will be the ability to educate university students in vital, highly specialized health information technology roles. UP-HI students can earn a master’s degree or certificate to prepare for roles such as:
- Clinical or public health leader
- Health information management and exchange specialist
- Health information privacy and security specialist
- Research and development specialist
- Programmer or software engineer
- Health IT Sub-Specialist

Beginning this fall, the School of Nursing will offer the certificate “Leadership in Health Information Technology for Health Professionals.” The certificate requires the completion of 15 credits of graduate coursework within 6-12 months. Most of the curricula will be offered online, although some courses will be offered both online and as in-person sessions. The school’s Master of Science in Nursing and Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) with a specialty in nursing informatics are also included in UP-HI programs.

“The certificate in health information technology may be what some working health professionals need in order to gain the necessary knowledge and leadership for their careers,” Westra states, describing the difference between the certificate and DNP options.

Over the next three years, the UP-HI consortium looks to educate more than 200 healthcare professionals in the six various specialty areas. The School of Nursing’s programs will educate a projected 43 new leaders in the clinical/public health role.

Many nurses have already exhibited exemplary leadership in the push towards more information technology training and education. “Today, 37 percent of a nurse’s time, on average, is spent documenting patient information,” says Westra. “With the advantages health informatics will make possible, nurses – and other health professionals – can spend that critical time actually providing the necessary care to patients.”

For more information about the programs mentioned in this article and their requirements and prerequisites, visit:

UP-HI
www.uphi.umn.edu
Before applying to UP-HI, students should first apply and be accepted to an academic program in one of the three UP-HI partner schools.

School of Nursing
Leadership in Health Information Technology for Health Professionals certificate
www.nursing.umn.edu/CPHLI
DNP in Nursing Informatics
www.nursing.umn.edu/DNP

Institute for Health Informatics (IHI)
www.ihi.umn.edu

Students may qualify for up to $10,000 in tuition support for their informatics courses. Students should apply now to receive funding. To be eligible, applicants must have a clinical or public health baccalaureate or higher degree, demonstrating the certificate’s intent to prepare leaders in all health care and public health specialties.

Tony Baisley is the communications director for both the School of Nursing and the Center for Spirituality & Healing.