

Curiosity and good mentors helped health administration alumnus succeed in healthcare

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With 40 years of health systems experience, alumnus Jim Wetrich (MHA '82) was a natural choice to speak to current School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine MHA students on [Wednesday, February 3](#).

A lot of changes have impacted the healthcare industry since his administrative residency at Ochsner Foundation Hospital, but he predicts that today's students will see "massive shifts in the way healthcare is being delivered" throughout their own careers.

"I would urge them to think broadly where the opportunities are going to be," he says. As a young professional, he thought his future would be entirely in the hospital setting, but he's remained flexible and open to changing his plan along the way. As a result, his career has stretched from the hospital setting to pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturing, to consulting. Wetrich currently runs his own consultancy, [The Wetrich Group](#).

The first shift for Wetrich came when he left Ochsner to follow his mentor, David R. Pitts, FACHE, in his consulting firm. With Pitts Management Associates, he helped launch the University HealthSystem Consortium and later left to work for the consortium, which included Tulane Hospital, before the next shift.

In 1989, Abbott Laboratories sought him out and over the next 11 years he held positions in corporate strategic planning, marketing, European commercial operations, and health systems sales, before becoming a divisional vice president with sales in excess of \$1 billion. It was at Abbott where he met his second mentor, John Kringel. Mentors played a key role in Wetrich's advancement and career success.

So how should a young person just starting out find mentors to guide them? "That's the \$64,000 question," Wetrich laughs. "Try to figure out at the start who's put you on his or her radar screen," he advises. "Most senior people look for talent."

Curiosity is another way to attract attention, at least it was for Wetrich. "I was curious how people got to the corporate office and I asked questions," he says. Then someone told him to just make an appointment to see the chief operating officer. He was intimidated, but soon after reaching out, the COO Tom Hodgson invited him to lunch. After Jim left Abbott, retired Abbott COO, Bob Parkinson, who later became Chairman and CEO of Baxter International, became his third mentor.

As diverse as his career has been, the next 35 years will bring unprecedented changes to the healthcare field, according to Wetrich. He sees healthcare ethics, data analytics, and artificial intelligence all playing key roles both in care delivery and in employment opportunities. He also predicts that a lot of large hospital

systems will be run by physicians and other clinical professionals in the future. Non-medical professionals will have to think about how they can stand out, he says.

Wetrich credits the business skills he learned at Tulane with preparing him for the kinds of opportunities he's had. It was professors like Dr. Hugh Long, he says, who helped him to understand how a business operates, how to read a profit and loss statement, and how to understand the financial levers at play in the healthcare industry.

Hoping to share some of his own knowledge, Wetrich is now in the process of writing a book about leadership.

Looking back, he says healthcare is "a super excellent place to be, and I've never had a single regret about being in the field."