

The Health System *Simulation*

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

As the pace of change in healthcare continues to accelerate, executives must be leaders, adept at navigating these changes/new pathways/new approaches as well as being able to respond to crises. The Health System Simulation provides an opportunity to experience the challenges of executive leadership and strategic decision-making in a competitive multi-hospital marketplace. This is a realistic exercise that effectively simulates the complexity and intensity of the evolving healthcare environment.

How is ACHE Collaborating with Columbia University?

ACHE is offering this new strategic decision-making and team-building exercise in collaboration with Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, including a unique pandemic component, to its 48,000 members across the globe.

How Does the Simulation Work?

Participants collaborate in this comprehensive strategic exercise as the senior leadership team of a hospital. They must analyze their institution's overall planned direction and make all decisions central to its successful operation including mission/vision, service line mix, capacity, investment in quality (professional/clinical, systems, etc.), insurer relations, marketing, staffing, financial structure, and so on.

A typical "run" of the simulation involves four to six teams strategically guiding their respective hospitals through a competitive marketplace. Teams submit decisions for each operating cycle simultaneously and receive prompt feedback on their hospital's performance in the context of its competitors. They then proceed to prepare decisions for the next operating cycle. The simulation exercise involves six full operating cycles and takes two days (in addition to a kick-off session), including supporting instructional modules, strategic financial analysis, feedback/discussion sessions and senior faculty consultants available for each team. Along the way, the teams create a mission statement, benchmark their progress, respond to topical news and develop a public service element.

Why a Simulation?

Simulations are a well-tested and effective means of instruction that have been employed in management education within business schools and industry since the late 1950s. They range from simple exercises to comprehensive problems in functional areas including marketing, finance and operations to complex total organizational models such as the Health System Simulation.

The Health System Simulation, which involves developing and implementing overall institutional strategy, is a key component of the Mailman School of Public Health. Participant evaluations reflect a consensus that this exercise is a highly powerful learning activity. Follow-up studies and surveys reinforce this, particularly with regard to improved and thoughtful decision-making “on-the-job” and teamwork and leadership competencies.

How Was This Originally Developed?

Custom-designed for the healthcare sector, the concept and working model for the Simulation was developed by a team from Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health led by Professor Thomas P. Ference and faculty and alumni serving in health system executive roles.

This first Health System Simulation in the United States simulated the complexities associated with managing a complex hospital. Participants, acting in mock hospital leadership teams in the roles of CEO, chief financial officer, chief medical officer, and chief nursing officer, worked through a series of sequential operating cycles, to make strategic decisions in operations—for example, how much money to allocate to marketing vs. quality improvements. After each round, teams reviewed their performance results and adjusted their resource allocations, supported by feedback from a simulation facilitator.

On the tenth anniversary, a new Simulation has been created, in consultation with Forio Online Simulations. This new simulation includes new topical elements such as a healthcare crisis, recession, community involvement, and marketing as well as collaborative features to help teams communicate and work together to make decisions for their simulated hospitals.

Why Change the Simulation Now?

“We have witnessed the devastating impact of the COVID-19 crisis on healthcare systems across the globe. Going forward, all hospital executives and providers need to be adept at navigating an unsettled marketplace, through a host of legal, regulatory and clinical challenges,” says [John S. Winkleman](#), Director, Health System Simulation program, Columbia Mailman School, the Department of Health Policy and Management.

The first simulation developed by Professor Ference and his team highlighted the complexities of modern hospital management. This new version of the simulation helps healthcare executives face challenges, such as preventing supply chain disruptions, managing lost revenues as healthcare workers redeploy to other areas.

Who Developed this New Version?

The new Health System Simulation was crafted by Mailman faculty and by Forio, a simulation development company that specializes in creating online multiplayer simulations and learning games. Forio was founded in 2001 for the explicit purpose of delivering strategic planning simulations over the web and connecting simulations to real world data to improve student learning. Forio Online Simulations builds custom strategic planning simulations and provides a simulation development platform to universities, businesses and government agencies globally.

Can Anyone Enroll in the Simulation?

Anyone healthcare leader who is interested in an intensive, experiential learning experience may enroll in the program. It has been used as a module in leadership development programs and as training for department chairs, hospital management teams, other providers or as a public or open workshop program for individual professionals.

Is the Simulation Available Online and/or in-Person?

The Health System Simulation through ACHE is currently offered as a virtual experience. The program may be offered in-person in the future.

What Does a Participant Need to be able to Participate?

Participants need only a computer with an up-to-date browser and a good internet connection in order to play. The simulation runs on Google Chrome, Microsoft Edge, Firefox, and Safari on both Windows and Mac computers.

What is the virtual learning experience like?

The program will be conducted on Columbia's Zoom platform. While ACHE participants will register through ACHE's website, program materials and virtual classroom access information will be provided directly from Columbia. Upon registering, you will be asked to complete a short pre-survey that will assess your prior knowledge and ask specific demographic questions to facilitate group placement.