Health professions education and health and biomedical research are top priorities at UTEP. The charge of this committee was to evaluate and develop recommendations regarding regional health professions program needs in relation to regional demand, health research priorities, and public health issues. It also evaluated and provided recommendations with regard to Texas Tech’s proposed medical school and explored opportunities for partnerships with EPCC, UACJ and other regional institutions.
UTEP health sciences graduates are instrumental in meeting the workforce needs for the region, including the fields of nursing, rehabilitation services, health promotion, kinesiology and clinical laboratory sciences.

**Introduction**

The Health Professions Education/Health and Biomedical Research Committee was charged with recommending goals for the following two areas:

- Health professional workforce needs for the region
- Regional health research priorities and public health

The committee first reviewed the data related to health professionals in the areas of nursing, pharmacy, and medicine, focusing both on current needs and on future market demands. Although the shortage of health professionals is not limited to these three categories, the committee limited the scope of its review to those focus areas.

**Critical Issues—Health professional workforce needs for the region:**

- The average age of El Paso nurses is 47.
- The average age of El Paso pharmacists is 57.
- The average age of El Paso physicians is 56.
- The small number of nurses entering and graduating from local programs at UTEP and EPCC is insufficient to meet the need.
- The greatest number of baby boomers will reach retirement age in 2015, placing significant strain upon the health care delivery system.
- A reduced number of nurses are immigrating to the U.S. since 9-11.
- Health futurists like Ewe Reinhardt from Princeton predict an exacerbation of the serious shortage that now exists. It is the condition of a “perfect storm”—fewer nurses, a greater number of elderly ill, fewer hospital beds available, fewer physicians, greater availability of health technology (e.g., implants such as knees, hips, hearts, discs, defibrillators, anti-spasticity devices, etc.), higher cost pharmaceuticals, and diminished reimbursement for health care providers.
- The physician ratio analysis demonstrates a significant need for Primary Care physicians (Family Practice, Obstetrics/Gynecology, Pediatrics, and Internal Medicine); for specialists in areas such as Nephrology, Cardiology, Gastroenterology, Endocrinology, Dermatology, Neurology, and Infectious Diseases; and for surgeons with specializations in areas such as Neurosurgery, Urology, General Surgery, Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, Orthopedic Surgery, and Cardio Thoracic and Vascular Surgery.
- Family nurse practitioners, who can provide up to 80% of primary care, are in short supply.
- The cost of medical malpractice insurance has had a negative impact on health care providers.
- The seamless border between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez expands the health care service area and creates unique health-related exposure risks.
Recommendations—Health professional workforce needs for the region:

• Additional funding to hire faculty in UTEP’s School of Nursing and the Pharmacy Program is critical as not all qualified applicants can be admitted due to shortages of faculty created primarily by low salaries compared to the private sector.
• Greater use of distance learning classrooms is needed to compensate for the shortage of qualified faculty.
• The accelerated nursing program should be implemented and expanded.
• UTEP and EPCC should place a high priority on providing scholarships to high school students planning to enter University/College programs in nursing and pharmacy.
• UTEP should support the implementation of the four-year medical school at Texas Tech Health Sciences Center-El Paso.
• UTEP should implement a high school/UTEP/medical school acceptance program similar to the one in place at UTMB Galveston.
• UTEP should expand its existing College of Health Sciences outreach to area magnet schools to counsel and recruit students to health professional careers. This initiative may be similar to the Texas Scholars Program, but with the focus on health careers.
• All private practitioners in the region should be surveyed to ascertain their views of the Medical School and the Regional health care model.
• The state legislature must provide increased funding for health care training programs in order to expand capacity and allow for the higher costs of providing these programs. Such funding should especially target high-demand occupations such as nurses, pharmacists, physicians, dentists, nuclear medicine technologists, and radiology technicians.
• The legislature should provide compensation to health care program faculty that is competitive with the wages they could earn outside of teaching. This will help break through the major barrier of expanding health care education programs—the lack of qualified faculty.
• All stakeholders—including the University—should advocate for continued aggressive tort reform to reduce medical malpractice insurance costs.
• UTEP should support the economic development of the city to create a strong market that will financially sustain health care providers. Such economic development will be an important retention tool for graduates of any of the education programs—nursing, medicine, pharmacy, etc.
• All stakeholders should continue to support collaborative initiatives among the area’s higher education facilities, including UTEP, Texas Tech, EPCC, the Universidad Autónoma de Cd. Juárez (UACJ), the UT-Houston School of Public Health, Sul Ross State University, and other regional partnerships.

Critical Issues—Regional health research priorities and public health

• There is no centralized database cataloguing active and completed research projects on either side of the border—in either El Paso or Cd. Juárez.
• There is a lack of structured collaboration among the various parties engaged in health care research, including UTEP, Texas Tech, private physicians, private hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, biomedical agencies, R. E. Thomason General Hospital, William Beaumont Army...
Medical Center, private employers, the El Paso City-County Health and Environmental District, state agencies, and federal agencies.

- There is little structured collaboration between entities in Cd. Juárez and those listed above, even in research on classic Border-related health issues.
- Those conducting research must deal with and meet the requirements of a variety of Institutional Review Boards (IRBs).
- Throughout the country there is a significant lack of Hispanic-based health research.

Recommendations—Regional health research priorities and public health

- A centralized repository of all research projects—both closed and active—should be established to maximize resources, prevent duplication, and build upon known outcomes.
- The database project could be managed by the Hispanic Health Disparities Research Center or by the Center for Border Health Research.
- The board of directors to manage the collaborative should include UTEP, EPCC, Texas Tech Health Sciences Center-El Paso, the UT-Houston School of Public Health, the El Paso City-County Health and Environmental District, William Beaumont and Thomason Hospitals, the private hospitals, a member of the County Medical Society, a representative of area medical manufacturers (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, Ethicon, etc.), the International Border Health Commission-El Paso, etc.
- The Greater El Paso, Hispanic, and Black Chambers of Commerce should collaborate with other stakeholders to promote and capitalize on El Paso’s prime location for Hispanic-based research as a way to attract biomedical research firms and major University players from throughout the United States. Such research could become another economic engine for El Paso.
- The Chambers and the news media should develop an awareness campaign about health-related research projects, their outcomes, their benefits, their contributions to the overall health of Hispanics, and their economic contribution to the City of El Paso.