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Tuesday, July 7, 2026

2026 WHA Health Care Leadership Academy Graduates Ten New Leaders

On June 16, ten individuals representing seven WHA member hospitals graduated from the five-month WHA Health Care Leadership Academy. Participating in both virtual and in-person synchronous learning, this group was exposed to the areas related to the “business of health care.” Guided by the UW Center for Professional and Executive Development (CPED) and WHA instructors, topics explored included strategy, finance, ethical issues and AI in health care, relationship management, leading organizational projects, navigating difficult conversations, communicating with confidence and credibility, leading change, quality improvement, the WHA Information Center and the intersection between government and health care.



Attending the graduation ceremony and celebration with the students were the instructors of the academy, UW CPED staff, WHA staff and representatives from the program sponsor, the WHA Foundation. As is tradition at the academy graduation, each student shared the aspect of the program that made the biggest impact on them. In addition to the program’s rich content and expert instructors, comments included the introspective experience of the 360 evaluation and the connection and relationships the group built with one another.

Capping off the ceremony was a surprise visit from Bucky Badger and the UW Marching Band.

WHA congratulates the graduates and their respective hospitals for investing in the future of health care in Wisconsin. An online photo album of the graduation celebration will be available in *The Valued Voice* soon.

- Elizabeth Baker, Reedsburg Area Medical Center, Chief Medical Officer
- Leah Bergstrom, HSHS St. Mary's Hospital Medical Center, Chief Administrative Officer
- Heidi Darling, Richland Hospital and Clinics, VP of Professional Services
- Craig Dreikosen, Sauk Prairie Healthcare, Director of Quality Services
- Laura Keller, Froedtert ThedaCare Health, South Region, Director Clinical Support
- Chris Kowalkiewicz, Froedtert ThedaCare Health, South Region, Executive Director Nursing & Clinical Operations
- Ashley Lagerquist, Vernon Health, Director-Revenue Cycle
- Drew Tilkens, Froedtert ThedaCare Health, South Region, Director Network Operations
- Kara Waggoner, Froedtert ThedaCare Health, South Region, VP Business Operations
- Justin York, Ascension, Sr. Director

To learn more about the WHA Leadership Academy, please contact Vice President, Education & Corporate Partnerships Leigh Ann Larson.

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EDUCATION EVENTS

Aug. 18, 2026

Culture College – Breakthrough Strategies for Creating and Sustaining a Magnetic Culture

Aug. 26, 2026

Denials Are a Clinical Problem

Sep. 10, 2026

Caring for Wisconsin's Caregivers: 2026 WHA Healthcare Workforce Well-being Summit