

WHA Health Care Leadership Academy Graduate Spotlight: Dr. Wendy Ledesma



Wendy Ledesma

Dr. Wendy Ledesma, a 2022 graduate of the WHA Health Care Leadership Academy, recently earned her MBA from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. WHA Vice President of Education and Corporate Partnerships Leigh Ann Larson sat down with Dr. Ledesma to learn about how participation in the WHA Health Care Leadership Academy contributed to her pursuing her MBA and how she has applied her learnings to her roles at Sauk Prairie Healthcare.

Leigh Ann: How did your participation in the Leadership Academy contribute to you wanting to pursue your MBA?

Dr. Ledesma: My participation in the WHA Health Care Leadership Academy was truly transformative and played a major role in inspiring me to pursue my MBA. The program exposed me to leadership concepts and business strategies taught by the University of Wisconsin School of Business and the Center for Professional & Executive Development faculty that extended beyond clinical medicine and challenged me to think more broadly about health care systems, organizational culture and long-term strategy.

Through the Academy, I gained insight into areas such as strategic planning, finance, communication, change management and team development by experts in the field. I realized that to create meaningful and sustainable impact in health care leadership, I wanted a stronger foundation in business and organizational leadership. The experience helped me recognize that physician leadership is not only about caring for patients, but also about helping shape systems that support caregivers, improve quality and strengthen communities.

The Health Care Leadership Academy also gave me confidence in my ability to lead at a higher level. Being surrounded by engaged leaders and mentors encouraged me to continue growing professionally and personally. Pursuing my MBA felt like a natural next step to build on the leadership skills and vision that began developing during the Health Care Leadership Academy. Dean Samba spoke to our cohort and shared the variety of MBA educational tracks offered by the UW School of Business. This allowed me to explore which program would meet my needs and allow me the flexibility to continue to work full time.

Leigh Ann: In the last few years since you graduated from the Leadership Academy, what experiences or content from the Leadership Academy have you used the most in your role at Sauk Prairie Healthcare?

Dr. Ledesma: Since graduating from the Health Care Leadership Academy, I have consistently applied many of the leadership principles and tools in my role at Sauk Prairie Healthcare, particularly in the areas of communication, change leadership, team engagement and strategic thinking.

One of the most valuable lessons was the importance of building strong relationships and fostering psychological safety within teams. As a physician executive leading patient safety and quality initiatives, I regularly rely on those skills to encourage open communication, collaboration and trust among multidisciplinary teams. Creating an environment where providers and staff feel heard and supported has been essential in advancing quality improvement and wellness initiatives.

I have also used many of the change management and strategic leadership concepts from the Academy while helping lead organizational initiatives, including provider wellness efforts, multidisciplinary collaboration and patient safety programs. The Academy



Wendy Ledesma with Bucky Badger at the 2022 WHA Health Care Leadership Academy graduation ceremony

reinforced the importance of aligning teams around a shared mission and communicating the “why” behind change, which has been critical in driving engagement and sustainable improvement.

The networking and mentorship aspects of the Health Care Leadership Academy were incredibly impactful. Dr. Mike Anderson, CEO of Fort HealthCare, and Dr. Esteban Miller, CMO of Black River Health, have been incredible colleagues to collaborate with in the rural health care space. Additionally, Alexa Urrutia-Comas, MHSA, FACHE and I met during the program. This led to several health care leadership events that we collaborated on together with the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE) and the National Association of Latino Healthcare Executives (NALHE). This partnership also led to two personal board opportunities. The relationships and perspectives I gained continue to influence how I approach leadership challenges and opportunities today. The experience with the WHA Health Care Leadership Academy helped shape my leadership style into one that is collaborative, mission-driven and focused on supporting both patients and caregivers. I'm incredibly grateful for this local world-class opportunity and collaboration between WHA and the UW School of Business and the Center for Professional & Executive Development. Thank you, WHA!

To learn more about the WHA Health Care Leadership Academy or to register for the 2027 program, [click here](#).

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