Garcia: Exciting Year Ahead for UA Health Sciences

Joe G.N. "Skip" Garcia, senior vice president for health sciences at the UA, discussed a number of topics - including research growth, student and faculty diversity, and the Banner-UA Health Network partnership - during an Arizona Health Sciences Center town hall meeting last week.

"I think FY14 was an exciting year," Garcia said during the meeting, held last Thursday at the UA Medical Center. "A lot of action going on. ... I think we're moving the ball down the field pretty well."

Garcia reviewed the one- and five-year goals he set for the Arizona Health Sciences Center [1] in December. The five-year goals include:

- Increasing AHSC biomedical research revenue
- Improving national rankings in research for each AHSC college
- Successfully competing for Clinical and Translational Science Awards and increasing the number of physician scientists recruited to the UA
- Increasing AHSC student, trainee and faculty diversity
- Establishing national leadership in interdisciplinary education and practice
- Increasing AHSC philanthropy and public-private partnerships

"These were ... fairly ambitious, but I think they're extraordinarily important for our success as a health sciences center," Garcia said. "Many of you know that we have outstanding faculty and outstanding programs, but we need to kick it up a notch in order to achieve the status of being a premier academic health center."

To grow health sciences research efforts, Garcia said the strategic use of resources will be critical going forward. Doubling the UA's research portfolio is one goal outlined in the UA's Never Settle [2] strategic academic and business plan.

Increasing diversity within AHSC is another important five-year goal, Garcia said. Francisco Moreno, professor of psychiatry at the UA College of Medicine - Tucson, has been appointed as assistant vice president for diversity to identify ways to improve student and faculty diversity at the AHSC.

"We need to do a better job of increasing our diversity," Garcia said. "These are tough issues, I get that ... but if we're committed to this, I think we can get this done."

Garcia also emphasized the importance of increasing philanthropic gifts to the center and building public-private partnerships to help secure resources and funding to the center in the future.

Decreasing financial support from state and philanthropic sources is one of the reasons why
the AHSC partnership with Banner Health became necessary, Garcia said. The partnership, to be finalized this fall, is expected to generate approximately $1 billion in new capital, academic investments and other benefits to the UA and the community. (Read more about the partnership in this Lo Que Pasa article [3].)

"I think everyone knows the revenue streams available for our academic missions are fairly limited," Garcia said. "Our health network had a very difficult year ... that's one of the reasons that this partnership with Banner ... is timely."

Garcia also reported on the one-year goals that the AHSC focused on during the previous academic year.

Those goals included increasing integration of AHSC resources ? such as research administration services and physical workspace ? across its colleges and centers, as well as strengthening the relationship between the AHSC and the UA Health Network [4].

"We're starting to build the infrastructure to allow us to have more engagement across the health sciences center," Garcia said, noting that Lauren Zajac joined the AHSC earlier this year as executive director of research administration to help ensure research administration services were available across AHSC units.

One-year goals also included recruiting for key positions, which now have been filled. Andrew Kraft has been appointed director of the UA Cancer Center, Leigh Neumayer has been appointed as head of the Department of Surgery, and Monica Kraft has been appointed as head of the Department of Medicine.

In addition, Charles Cairns will join the UA in November as vice dean of the College of Medicine and assistant vice president of research in the Office of the Senior Vice President for Health Sciences.

"His leadership, I think, will be a really important addition to our overall health sciences efforts here," Garcia said. "This is going to be an exciting year for us."

If you missed the town hall, you can view Garcia's entire presentation online here [5].

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[5] https://streaming.biocom.arizona.edu/event/?id=25406&play=1&format=hd