

# POLICY FORUM

## *Introduction*

### **Imagination: A Key Tool in North Carolina's Health Care Worker Toolbox**

For years, family friends, students, and neighbors have approached me seeking advice for daughters, sons, nephews, nieces—heck, themselves—about seeking a career in medicine.

They didn't always mean medicine as in "becoming a doctor." Sometimes they asked about becoming a nurse, or about this specialty or that. Gradually, these questions broadened to include the roles of nurse practitioners and physician assistants. Then, pharmacists, as that role too became more specialized and imaginative.

Not much of a career counselor, I could offer stories and contacts, and after my dozens of years of practice I could share how much had changed, and that the future would not be static. To be prepared for any of the health professions, I told those who asked, was to be prepared to be imaginative.

Little did I know that our needs would call not just for the traditional health professions to evolve but for new and imaginative health professions to meet needs we hadn't even dreamed of.

This issue of the *North Carolina Medical Journal* looks at the present and the future of the traditional and imaginative health professions to ask how we are training practitioners for that evolving future, and if we are keeping pace with the needs and demands of our growing state. Read it for the promise of what is there now, and with imagination for what needs to be there next. NCMJ

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