

# HEALTH EXECUTIVE

Where Leadership Begins

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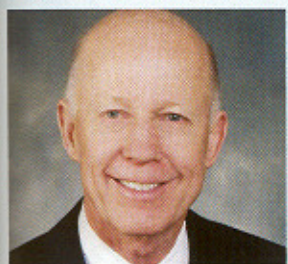
## Strength in Numbers

FBN used the weight of its  
14-member alliance to solve the  
long-term care training challenge



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**Cass Wheeler tells Liz French that for the American Heart Association to achieve its goals, it can't work alone.**

## American Heart Association

# Reaching Out

**T**he American Heart Association has some lofty goals: reduce death rates from coronary heart disease and stroke by 25%; reduce the prevalence of smoking, high blood cholesterol, and physical inactivity by 25%; and stop the growth rates of diabetes and obesity in their tracks. And it all needs to be accomplished by 2010.

According to Cass Wheeler, CEO of the Dallas, Texas-based nonprofit organization, the way to accomplish these goals is through communicating to not just the medical community, but the general public as well. With projects such as Go Red For Women, CPR Anytime, Alliance for a Healthier Generation, and the hospital-based program Get With The Guidelines, the AHA is well on its way to saving millions of lives.

"We've always supported and promoted scientific research, and our commitment to maintain the integrity of that science has fostered a positive public perception of our brand. The strength of

the AHA results from the strong commitment of volunteers nationwide and our grassroots ability to mobilize resources that reach out to communities," said Wheeler.

### Healthy relationships

To reach men and women of all ages and ethnic backgrounds, the AHA has partnered with government agencies and public and private companies to spread the word about preventive care. "We realize we can't achieve our goal alone, so we've partnered with a number of organizations to mobilize our efforts. So far, it's been effective. Coronary death rates, stroke, tobacco use, hypertension, and cholesterol rates are all down. We still have some work to do in the areas of diabetes and obesity. The goals are a little different there—we just want to stop the rates of growth," said Wheeler.

For instance, AHA collaborates with more than 1,000 hospitals on its quality improvement program, Get With The Guidelines. The program



ensures that the treatment hospitals provide for coronary artery disease, stroke, and heart failure is aligned with the latest scientific guidelines.

On the consumer side, AHA launched its Go Red For Women program in February 2004. What began as a grassroots campaign to raise awareness that heart disease is the number one killer of women has grown into a nationwide movement. The program, nationally sponsored by Macy's and Pfizer with additional support from the PacificCare Foundation and Bayer Aspirin, provides women with information on healthy eating, exercise, and risk factor reduction, such as smoking cessation, weight maintenance, blood pressure control, and blood cholesterol management.

In addition to educating the public about preventive care to ward off heart attacks, the AHA partnered with Laerdal Medical to spread information on what to do if a family member or friend experiences cardiac arrest. CPR Anytime for Family and Friends is a self-directed kit that teaches the fundamentals of CPR in about 20 minutes.

To reach younger generations, AHA has joined forces with the Clinton Foundation to create an Alliance for a Healthier Generation. The program makes learning about exercise and nutrition fun for children via an interactive Web site and a Nick News Special program called Fight to be Fit. Nickelodeon has committed \$28 million a year for the next three years in airtime to get the message out to kids and get them engaged.

"The campaign has four pillars. The first is that we want it to be for kids, by kids. The second is a recognition program for schools that deal with issues around vending machines, school lunches, and physical activity. The third pillar encourages restaurants and food manufacturers to have healthier options. Kids will always want to eat hamburgers, pizza, and French fries, and we want to find a way to make those foods less harmful. The fourth pillar will consist of encouraging healthcare providers to work together to address these issues," said Wheeler.

"Our science is translated for multiple audiences: medical professionals, patients, caregivers, public officials, and government representatives. By putting the right information in the

right hands at the right time, better health decisions will result."

### Get with the program

Get With The Guidelines educates and empowers healthcare teams to save lives and reduce costs by closing the treatment gap. Core components include in-hospital initiation of evidence-based therapies, quality improvement training, facilitation of best practices, patient education materials, and decision-support tools that generate real-time reports.

"GWTG puts our expertise to work for hospitals and healthcare providers by systematically improving quality cardiovascular care," said Wheeler. "Hospitals implementing the program see measurable improvements in patient outcomes that often translate to an improved bottom line." Get With The Guidelines was the first hospital-based program to receive an award the Innovation in Prevention Award from the Health and Human Services Department in December 2004.

### Fit and flexible

To stay on top of changes in the healthcare industry and society, AHA has worked hard to streamline its infrastructure and stay flexible—crucial to an organization with 22 million volunteers and donors. Several years ago, the AHA moved from having more than 50 affiliates across the country to 12 affiliates, improving the ease of many processes and decisionmaking.

"With our volunteer structure, we have a number of committees and task forces dedicated to different issues, and they're constantly scanning the horizon to make sure we are identifying current trends," said Wheeler.

"We have a system that is fairly speedy for an organization our size. We not only have regular meetings throughout the year, all the way up to the board of directors, but teleconferences as well. The board of directors meets face-to-face three times a year on top of three or four teleconferences. So if there's something that needs a quick decision, we can call a special meeting to facilitate that. The board is good about developing and signing off on the strategic plan and establishing goals for the year. But then the board leaves it up to the staff to carry out the day-to-day operations," he said.

