

# ASU Health's alliance with HonorHealth to benefit researchers, students — and Arizona residents who never step foot in a classroom

**As primary clinical affiliate for the John Shufeldt School of Medicine and Medical Engineering, HonorHealth opens up opportunities for improving care for the state**

By Scott Bordow, ASU News  
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The health care field is traditionally cautious and slow to change. Arizona State University President Michael Crow is a risk taker who challenges conventional thinking.

And that's why John Neil, chief physician executive and network strategy officer for HonorHealth, thinks the agreement for HonorHealth to serve as the primary clinical affiliate for ASU's new John Shufeldt School of Medicine and Medical Engineering could be a case of diverging philosophies creating a new and improved health care system in Arizona.

"I think it's an interesting juxtaposition, an interesting mix of cultures," Neil said. "I think health care needs a little bit more of the Michael Crow thinking. ASU is the [New American University](#), right? We can learn from how he kind of reinvented, in some ways, the business model of higher education, and maybe we can work with ASU to create the new American health system."

The affiliation, [announced in October 2024](#), is a significant step forward in the development of ASU Health and represents a collaborative effort to create the clinical education programs needed for ASU's new medical school. The agreement will help develop a unique, nationally recognized medical education program to attract and retain outstanding students, residents and faculty.

In addition, HonorHealth will house the majority of the training experiences for the medical school's undergraduate students, with rotations in hospitals throughout Phoenix, Scottsdale and surrounding communities.

"It's the most exciting thing in my career," said [Holly Lisanby](#), founding dean and Foundation Professor of the Shufeldt School. "It really is going to be transformative. The vision of building something completely new that has not existed before and where there's such perfect alignment between the partners to deliver on the goal of improving health outcomes in Arizona... It's a big, hairy, audacious challenge."

Since the affiliation announcement in 2024, ASU has recruited and onboarded approximately 200 HonorHealth faculty — physicians, clinicians and nurses — to serve as faculty in the Shufeldt School. Lisanby said they have helped develop the curriculum and will teach classes once the first cohort of 36 students arrives on campus in July.

Priya Radhakrishnan, chief academic officer of HonorHealth and vice dean of clinical affairs and graduate medical education in the Shufeldt School, said ASU Health's emphasis on engineering — the school offers a multidisciplinary curriculum that integrates engineering and AI through a concurrent degree structure that confers both an MD and MS in medical engineering — has invigorated HonorHealth.

"I think that's an important part of the story," Radhakrishnan said. "Our faculty is really invested. A lot of our faculty here have done their bachelor's degrees at ASU in engineering, and as (this affiliation) was coming out, we were like, 'How do we find faculty who are interested in engineering?' And everyone just came out of the woodwork, so it was really nice."

Radhakrishnan said one of the unique aspects of the curriculum is that students serving their clerkship — a clinical rotation where students transition from classroom learning to hands-on patient care — will have one week dedicated to medical engineering.

"Clinical faculty will be guiding students on projects as they start examining the health care system," she said. "One example is looking at remote patient monitoring. How do you improve access to care?"

"The goal is really focusing on innovation and improving that sort of care. And what's interesting is both ASU and HonorHealth have those similar values. So it's really about aligning it."

[Sherine Gabriel](#), executive vice president of ASU Health, said the benefits of the affiliation with HonorHealth go beyond its role as the primary clinical affiliate for the Shufeldt School:

HonorHealth and ASU's [Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation](#) are conducting joint research on workforce development and the impact of artificial intelligence in nursing, Gabriel said, and ASU students are doing nursing projects within the HonorHealth system.

HonorHealth is working with the [College of Health Solutions](#) on its Food Is Medicine program, which focuses on integrating nutrition into health care to combat chronic diseases: "We're building these tool kits that a clinician in the office can use to assess not only a patient's nutrition and its impact on their health, but be able to prescribe nutrition-based therapy that could aid in their

recovery,” Gabriel said. “We can do the research, but we have to try them out in a clinical setting, and that’s what (HonorHealth) is giving us the opportunity to do.”

ASU and HonorHealth are discussing a “human performance” project that would study how to optimize human performance, from athletes to the elderly: “It’s just kind of another example of what we’re working on,” Gabriel said. “We’re building programs together, and it’s kind of creating that multifaceted relationship that we all expect will improve health outcomes.”

Todd LaPorte, CEO of HonorHealth, said one of the benefits to ASU will be access to HonorHealth’s footprint of resources, which includes primary care and urgent care clinics, a behavioral health hospital, a rehabilitation hospital and acute care hospitals.

“We really are availing ourselves of a very diverse set of care settings for ASU students,” LaPorte said.

One example: HonorHealth recently received a grant focusing on health care in rural settings and is working with ASU to develop a curriculum for the program.

“That will be an opportunity for students who are interested in, say, tribal health or veterans affairs or vulnerable populations,” Radhakrishnan said.

Lisanby said one vital aspect of the affiliation is that ASU is now able to be more competitive for research funding.

“For example, if we are applying for a grant regarding artificial intelligence on medical images to help improve heart disease or pulmonary disease ... our (faculty and researchers) here need access to clinical data. Being able to collaborate with HonorHealth to have access to that data, to have access to the clinicians who bring that medical piece ... you cannot overstate how catalytic that is,” she said.

“It’s also a benefit to our ASU faculty to be able to translate their innovations and breakthroughs into a true clinical application. This is great for our city and our state to attract federal and other funding that might have gone to other institutions.”

Neil pointed out another way that Arizona residents will benefit: improved health care services, thanks to the employment pipeline such a relationship will create. He cited data that shows medical students are more likely to remain in the community they train in.

“If we wanted to stay really competitive for some of that high-end, specialty talent, forming an academic affiliation was important to us,” Neil said. “Couple that with ASU being obviously well known for innovation, and that creates a different type of unique recruitment opportunity.

“On a long-term basis, we think this will increase the number and quality of physicians that are staying here in Arizona.”

Although the affiliation with ASU and HonorHealth is still in its infancy, Gabriel said it has already exceeded expectations. Lisanby agreed.

“We have mission alignment,” Lisanby said. “If you look at our charter, our commitment to taking responsibility for the health of our community that we serve means our clinical affiliate should have the same goal.

“HonorHealth is locally owned and embedded in our community. So our students who will be training there will be embedded in our community.”

LaPorte said it’s a great fit that will benefit the state.

“We’re truly here to try to improve the health of Arizona, and that’s kind of a cool thing about ASU Health, which is the umbrella that includes the (medical school),” Neil said. “It really is about the impact, the broader health of the Arizona population.

“I would predict that in five to 10 years, ASU will have the most attractive medical school in the state of Arizona. I think this is going to be a big hit.”

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*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

## Main image





HonorHealth CEO Todd LaPorte (shown at the HonorHealth Scottsdale Osborn Medical Center) said one of the benefits to ASU will be access to HonorHealth's footprint of resources, which includes primary care and urgent care clinics, a behavioral health hospital, a rehabilitation hospital and acute care hospitals. Photo by Samantha Chow/Arizona State University

## Text image(s)



Priya Radhakrishnan (front, center), chief academic officer of HonorHealth and vice dean of clinical affairs and graduate medical education in the Shufeldt School, poses with other Shufeldt School faculty and administrators. From left: Tony Avellino, Doug Lake, Jeff Kingsbury, Heather Clark, Karen Anderson and Tanisha Price-Johnson. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News