



## KAREN WOLK FEINSTEIN, PHD Biography

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Karen Wolk Feinstein, PhD, is President and Chief Executive Officer of the Jewish Healthcare Foundation (JHF) and its supporting organizations, the Pittsburgh Regional Health Initiative (PRHI) and Health Careers Futures (HCF).

Appointed to head the foundation in 1991, she initially focused on health issues endemic to aging, women's health and underserved populations. She has since made JHF a leading voice in patient safety, healthcare quality and workforce issues.

When Dr. Feinstein founded PRHI, it was the nation's first community-wide collaborative devoted to making an entire region's healthcare institutions safer, more efficient and more diligent in applying best practices through the use of quality engineering principles. PRHI was a forerunner in adapting Toyota Production System practices to health care and in espousing the view that safety and quality improvements were key to containing healthcare costs.

Dr. Feinstein founded HCF to assist the healthcare industry in attracting and retaining employees, particularly nursing professionals. HCF has since worked in collaboration with PRHI to help clinicians and institutions understand the value of quality engineering and work redesign in engaging and retaining a skilled healthcare workforce.

Dr. Feinstein's interest in patient safety grew out of her involvements as head of JHF and as a member of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, an economic development organization made up of leaders from the business and nonprofit sectors.

By the mid-1990s, she had taken an interest in research that increasingly suggested modern medicine – for all of its technologically sophisticated power to heal – often harmed patients and fell short of known, evidence-based practices. She also saw that runaway healthcare costs were becoming an unparalleled concern among employers in Pittsburgh and elsewhere.

PRHI has helped redefine the nation's understanding of healthcare safety, quality and efficiency. Since its early work in infection control, PRHI has expanded its portfolio of projects to take aim at some of the most visible, damaging and costly problems in health care. These include: hospital-acquired infections, errors in pathology, outmoded treatment models for diabetes, sub-optimal practices in the treatment of cardiac patients and safety and quality challenges in long-term care.

Dr. Feinstein's foresight in identifying risks to patient safety as a paramount national concern and in bringing Western Pennsylvania's healthcare stakeholders together to combat medical errors has made her a much-solicited source of counsel to policymakers at the regional, state and federal levels. She provided significant input into Pennsylvania Governor Edward Rendell's 2007 healthcare reform initiative and currently co-chairs Governor Rendell's Chronic Care Management, Reimbursement and Cost Reduction Commission's Aligning Incentives Subcommittee. She also serves on the Commission's Executive Committee.

Prior to founding PRHI and HCF, Dr. Feinstein put much of JHF's programmatic emphasis on the Pittsburgh region's vulnerable populations. Before joining JHF, she gained a broad perspective on the needs of Southwestern Pennsylvania's poor, disabled and elderly communities as Senior Vice President of United Way of Allegheny County.

With that background, she brought to the Foundation an alternative vision of aging and of the health issues associated with growing older. She made them a focus of the JHF's work that continues to this day. Dr Feinstein bucked societal and medical establishment views that, past a certain age, people began a straight-line physical and mental deterioration that improvements in health care and social support could do little to arrest. Her passion for the needs of the elderly proved as compelling to others as her passion for patient safety, making her foundation a leading national voice on the issues of aging.

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She is a past President of Grantmakers in Health, a nationwide council of foundations dedicated to funding health-related projects, and a past President of Grantmakers of Western Pennsylvania, a regional council of philanthropies.

Dr. Feinstein has previously held executive posts at other nonprofits, served on the faculties of Boston College and Carnegie Mellon University, and taught a course at the University of Pittsburgh. She also was the editor of the *Urban and Social Change Review*. Dr. Feinstein earned her bachelor's degree at Brown University, her master's at Boston College and her PhD at Brandeis University.