

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You are listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, Editor-in-Chief of WorkingNation. Work in Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators and decision-makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges. Technology has transformed the healthcare sector for the past few decades, from robotics to wearable technology, to telemedicine, and of course AI. This is creating a huge and growing talent gap in health tech, both in the US and around the world. One organization helping to close that gap is Medtronic. It's launched Medtronic Spark, a global 10-year commitment to propel one million students from low-income households into high-paying healthcare technology careers. Recently at South by Southwest EDU I spoke with Dr. Sally Saba, Medtronic Global Chief Inclusion Diversity Officer and President of the Medtronic Foundation. She starts by explaining the mission of Medtronic and how Medtronic Spark started.

Dr. Sally Saba, Medtronic Foundation president:

I was asked to take on the leadership of the foundation two years ago, and we've had a foundation for 75 years, and I was new to this philanthropy side. And I went around and asked for employees, what are we known for? We've had a foundation for a very long time, what have we done? And most employees couldn't tell me. Couldn't tell me, here's the thing we solved or here's the thing we did. Are a foundation that's been in disaster response, employee engagement programs. And then we enabled a lot of other STEM programs, so to speak. But we didn't have our own thing. That's where this defining who we're about has been the mission I've been on for the last two years with my team. We decided not to sit in a room by ourselves and go decide on something. We went out and asked thousands of employees, what would you like the legacy and the mission of this foundation to be going forward? And they bubbled up several ideas and then we had a contest between the final two and our board agreed on one. So now we have Medtronic Spark, which I'm happy to speak to you about today, will be the North Star, the mission of the Medtronic Foundation going forward.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So Medtronic Foundation, Medtronic Spark is your North Star. What does that entail? What is it that you're trying to do?

Dr. Sally Saba, Medtronic Foundation president:

We're going to try and solve a really big challenge that's in our industry. And I'll share with you what the size of the opportunity is before I share with you what the actual program is if you don't mind. Workforce shortages is going to be one of the biggest challenges within the healthcare industry. Not only for healthcare. They say between around 11 million of shortages just within the next four to five years. Now you add onto that how AI is going to transform and evolve the landscape of education faster than people can keep up. They say that 65% of students in schools today will work in jobs that don't even exist yet, and 45% of the workforce today will need new re-skilling to even be able to keep up with that future.

Now we're in healthcare and healthcare is going to be disrupted one of the most by AI, and it's a really cool disruption because it can lower the cost of healthcare, it can make it accessible to more people around the world. And our employees are very passionate about youth and education. So this is where it all came from. So Medtronic Spark is a 10-year goal to funnel or enable 1 million students from low-income households into the health tech space with a career at the end of it. We're going to do that through three different avenues, so we can target different age groups and have closures of gaps. We're going to have innovation labs, which is a place where youth can go and tinker and get excited about

technology and play with it. One of our co-founders, Earl Bakken, he was fascinated by Frankenstein and that's why he got into inventing the pacemaker. He was a tinkerer. So we're going to have these innovation labs that allow kids to play with technology, understand the human body, biomedical engineering, what it's all about.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And what age group is that? And is that going to start out as youngsters?

Dr. Sally Saba, Medtronic Foundation president:

Youngsters until high school. An age that's right before they're trying to decide what they're trying to do. But we're figuring out the details exactly for who we're going to test and iterate and drive from there. The second piece is scholarships. I've known a lot of scholarships to get kids in school. I'm not sure I know enough scholarships that get people out of school. So we are going to design scholarships with different angles to them to really enable the graduation, not just the here's something to get in. That's the core to our design because our principle of design is we don't want to touch lives, we want to change the trajectory of lives through this work. And that brings me to the most exciting part of the program, which is the third pillar, which is Spark Credentials. Spark Credentials are going to be certification and fully credentialed programs that are jobs required today in the technology field, in the healthcare field that we have shortages in. And if you come and get our credential, which will be for free and will be global, at the end of that, you are employable by a company as good as Medtronic by us and companies like us. So it's a three-pronged approach. We're launching it in May and it's going to take us hopefully for the next 10 years. And I'm hoping that it becomes a household name and a legacy for Medtronic in many ways.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

What are those jobs that you're targeting to be a part of this program?

Dr. Sally Saba, Medtronic Foundation president:

We're open now to what are the biggest ones? So we're working with our HR community, our commercial community to say what is going to be needed in the future? Because it's going to take us two to three years to build that out and so forth. But already we have an emergence of two spaces. We have in our healthcare technology profile, we need something called clinical mappers. So for some of our atrial systems, we need people who can go into the heart and map out where you need the probes and things for our products. So clinical specialists that are specialized in mapping is something that we need. Pacers is something that we need. So clinical practitioners, clinical specialists are areas that we're going to start off right out of the gate with. We need to hire roughly 2000 of those a year, and that's not going down over the next 10 years. It's only going to increase globally. Our cardiac ablation solution requires mappers in it. And with robotics emerging with things like that, there's this need for people who really understand the biomedical engineering side of technology and how do you do these things.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And what skills are we looking at when you're talking about these jobs? If somebody was listening and saying, "I can't be a clinical mapper. I can't be a pacer. I don't know what that means." So what would they have to know to be able to do this?

Dr. Sally Saba, Medtronic Foundation president:

They wouldn't have to know anything prior to coming into our program. They would have to have a passion for learning, for being curious about what we will teach them and a capability to learn science and science-y things. But the programs that will be designed that you can go out of high school, not require any further education than high school, and through this degree from end to end, you can be in this field. These are jobs that pay between 80 to \$100,000 at the onset of them. They're in high, high demand. So if you can learn anatomy and you can learn how to understand science and things, we will teach you those and therefore, it's a low bar to entry. It's not a high bar of previous education to enter in. It's a desire to learn and be in this field. And if you're willing and come from a low-income household, we will be happy to have you participate.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And I know that you're looking at this launching in May, and it's going to take a couple of years to totally work out what the program is, but what is your vision of it right now? Is it online? Is it clinical? Is it a combination of both?

Dr. Sally Saba, Medtronic Foundation president:

It's a combination of both because sometimes if we pick certain jobs, they might require an online education and then an in-person hands-on learning so we're building that into the program. And while we're launching in May and we don't have the credential program ready yet, we're going to launch with our scholarships and our innovation labs. Those will come out in our first year. And we already have the first two jobs lined up for the credentialing so hopefully within a year we'll have those ready. But they should be really 90-something percent online. And then if there is this extra piece where you need the hands-on, we'll take care of that as well.

One of the things we learned ... So when we were trying to decide what to do, we actually went and visited some of our local talent that work in our manufacturing sites. So these are hourly workers in the Dominican Republic and in Brazil. And we tried to understand what's the true barrier if we were to launch something like this. And many said, "Our family members, they can't go to school. They can't afford that. They don't have the laptop. Our parents need us to work in order to do these things." So we've built into our model that if you need a laptop, we'll get you one. If you need a stipend for your family to allow you to take the education, we'll do it. So what I'm saying, we're really coming at this from an angle of we don't want there to be barriers for the selection that we make. We want to figure out what they are and help overcome them and get people through it.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You gave a number earlier of 11 million. Big number. Is that globally? Is that the US?

Dr. Sally Saba, Medtronic Foundation president:

That's just in the US?

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Where are you going to ... Like you said, hopefully 90% of this is online. Where are the jobs? Are they around the country or are they specifically in one location?

Dr. Sally Saba, Medtronic Foundation president:

We are actually still deciding which locations because we want Medtronic presence in those locations. So while we're in 150 countries around the world, we're probably going to start with six or seven of our own locations because we want to benefit from enabling this pipeline development as well. So the US has high demand, Europe and the Middle East. The demand is everywhere. So we're going to be selective about the countries where we start to do it, but the access will be global. But like I said, we're going to start some places, see where the demand is, is it working or not, and iterate from there. This is our first time ever to do something like this so we're trying to go in it with humility, with learning. We were just here on a panel to learn from some industry experts, but we want to try iterate, see what's working, and then lean into that and let go of what's not working fast. Fail fast.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

How much of the innovation labs and scholarships do you think are going to be US based to start with?

Dr. Sally Saba, Medtronic Foundation president:

Probably scholarships are going to be less in the US and more global only because of the dollar dynamic. So a scholarship somewhere around in the Dominican Republic costs a lot less than in the US. So we have a model where I think it might be 40% local and 60% global, but it will be enough. We want to benefit our backyard and benefit the world.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And the innovation labs?

Dr. Sally Saba, Medtronic Foundation president:

We're going to start in two locations. I think our first one is going to be in Minneapolis, which is where our headquarters is. And I think our team member who's leading this is trying to convince us to do the second one somewhere global so we can learn. So we're figuring that piece out.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You said you did some of the pre-programmed, pre Spark questioning around the world and talked to your own employees. Is there going to be a portion of this program that's going to say, "Hey, employees, if you want to go for this, we can help you." And that's like a retention thing. Keeping the workers within your space.

Dr. Sally Saba, Medtronic Foundation president:

I love that question because when I looked at our own frontline employees who are hourly workers, their children can benefit from this program. And when we were designing it, I really asked the team to make sure we keep that in mind. So if you are a low-income household, your children can benefit from this and you can as well. So yes, absolutely we want to make sure that that is there.

And then there's other opportunities. So you can sponsor a kid. So our funds of matchmaking and things like that, you can be part of the scholarships for students. In the innovation labs, we want you to come and bring your children and teach other children as well. So part of our innovation, we're looking at a mobile model, I think that's where we're going to land. But when we bring that to a place, then your kids and the kids within the community can come and learn together and learn science together and then maybe make those connections and know. So you can adopt a kid, you can provide scholarships, and you can be part because we have the best engineers in the world working at Medtronic, and they can

help design the credentialing programs. They can be mentors for these students. So we think there are a lot of different avenues for how our employees can engage.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

What is your background? How did you start working at Medtronic?

Dr. Sally Saba, Medtronic Foundation president:

My background is really all over the place. I grew up in Cairo, Egypt. I went to medical school and then I left medicine and went into telecommunications, and then a whole bunch of other things. When I came to the States, it was really hard to find a job, so I started my own business and then the recession hit, so I was like, "Okay. I got to go back to corporate." So I actually joined Kaiser Permanente in 2009 and that was my intro into this supplier diversity, diversity space. I have a very interesting background, but I'm on a mission to help heal people. I wanted to be a doctor because I wanted to help heal people and now I feel like I stumbled into this space.

The reason I'm with Medtronic is five years ago, they hired me as their first global chief inclusion diversity officer. And then, like I said, two years ago, they asked me to take on the foundation. I've done a lot of things where I've never done that before, but I'm willing to go in and figure it out. And I think medical school taught me that to diagnose a challenge before you find solutions, and it's been a really fun ride.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

That was my interview with Dr. Sally Saba, Medtronic Global Chief Inclusion Diversity Officer and President of the Medtronic Foundation at South by Southwest EDU. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Thanks for listening.