

Partnering with Health Career Programs

If the public health workforce is the key to public health infrastructure and if the population of our six-state region is becoming much more diverse, how do we get more diverse young people interested in public health professions?

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Pipeline programs are one important tool in ensuring an adequate and appropriate future public health workforce by encouraging an interest in the health professions among middle-school, high-school, and undergraduate students. However, pipeline programs have largely targeted medicine and, to a lesser extent, nursing and other personal health professions. One option for public health is to develop its own pipeline programs. The Tacoma-Pierce County program (*see box on p. 15*) is one example of a successful pipeline program targeting public health. Although this is a viable approach, the funding disparity between public health pipeline programs and those targeting medicine and other personal health professions is enormous. Relying exclusively on public health-specific efforts will not reach the volume of students needed for the future public health workforce.

A second option, and the focus of this article, is for public health to partner with health care pipeline programs, for example Health Careers Opportunity Programs (HCOP).

The case for collaboration

The benefits of collaborative pipeline development for public health include the direct benefits of exposing students to public health early during a period of generalized interest in health care and the opportunity to expose students in personal health care fields, such as medicine and nursing, to public health. The indirect benefit is that of building a personal health care workforce that is a better partner with and advocate for public health.

Often, students in middle and high school and even early undergraduates, have an undifferentiated interest in health care. This period of wide-eyed wonder with the many ways that a career in health care can help them give back to their communities is an ideal time to expose students to the public health professions and their associated rewards.

Public health professionals are often drawn from the ranks of the personal health care workforce. Many of us were lucky enough to discover public health along the way (as I did in nursing school on my way to what I thought was a

career as a nurse-midwife). Collaborative pipeline efforts would permit early exposure to public health for future public health physicians, nurses, nutritionists, and others whose training will likely involve a stint in a program focusing on personal health care.

Finally, collaborative pipeline programs can provide the opportunity to train future health professionals who may provide care for underserved communities—communities of color, poor communities, and rural communities. For those communities especially, health care providers who understand the basic principles and practice of public health and who have some knowledge of how public health works at the local level will be more effective in their delivery of personal health care services. It will also enable them to be more effective collaborators with and advocates for public health when the need arises—as in the course of a communicable disease case investigation, a disease outbreak, or bioterrorism planning.

Public health has unique contributions to make to collaborative health professions pipeline programs, for example, understanding the determinants of the health status of populations. Other contributions by public health to collaborative pipeline programs include age-appropriate training in concepts of epidemiology and the health of populations and expertise in research, health education, communicable disease control, and environmental health.

How to strengthen collaboration

Build relationships of inclusion. Many health career pipeline programs are interested in drawing in new partners during their planning and early implementation phases. In identifying partnerships that can be leveraged to include public health, present the benefit of public health involvement to the existing health profession pipeline program, acknowledge its agenda, and point out how the inclusion of public health can help reach its goals.

Public health will not be welcomed as a partner if it is viewed as diverting students from personal health service fields to the field of public health. When looking to build a partnership, it is important to emphasize the need for students in such programs to have public health knowledge and skills, regardless of their future career paths, as well

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as to acknowledge the potential that some students may shift to a career in public health.

Institutionalize. Over time, opportunities to institutionalize partnerships between public health and health profession pipeline programs, such as joint funding opportunities, will present themselves. Other evidence of institutionalization would be diversity of public health professionals involved (not just relying on one person to carry the torch for public health in any given program) and credit offered for the public health trainings.

Conclusion

Collaboration in development of health profession pipelines has the potential to help address public health's need to develop a future workforce, to contribute to productive partnering between future personal health care professionals and public health, and to ensure that future health care and public health leadership understand one another. As in much of public health, the leveraging power of partnerships and collaboration could prove an effective method to maximize limited existing resources. 🐾

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Resources

Washington State Board of Health Report. www.doh.wa.gov/SBOH/Priorities/disparities/disparities.htm.

Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care. www.iom.edu/report.asp?id=4475.

Institutional and Policy-Level Strategies for Increasing the Racial and Ethnic Diversity of the U.S. Healthcare Workforce. www.iom.edu/project.asp?id=4888.

Bureau of Health Professions Diversity Programs. <http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/diversity/default.htm>.

Nursing Workforce Diversity. <http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/grants/applications/03nrsdiversity.htm>.

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health. Principles of Partnership. <http://futurehealth.ucsf.edu/ccph/principles.html#principles>.

Health Career Pipeline Programs

This sample of programs for middle-school, high-school, and new college students shows the wide variety of health career pipeline activities in the Northwest. For expanded descriptions, see the Web exclusives on the journal's Web site (www.nwcp/hp/nph/f2003/).

Programs for High-School Students

Oregon Health Careers Center, Youth for Health/Jóvenes por la Salud

Goal: To provide students with interactive, health-related activities to introduce them to health careers and promote going on to college.

Description: Begun in 1999, the twice-a-month, after-school program focuses on first-generation, college-bound, low-income high-school students. Activities include field trips, college visits, college prep and study skills, job shadowing, and internships (80 hours with health professionals and health care facilities; activities range from front desk duties at a migrant health clinic to doing rounds with a cardiologist).

Information: www.ohcc.org/progiov.html; 503-691-9088 x113

Oregon Health Careers Center, SEARCH (Summer Enrichment Academy for Careers in Health)

Goal: To prepare students for successfully completing post-secondary allied health programs.

Description: Begun in 2003, this 6-week summer academy focuses on low-income high-school students. Participants take Portland Community College courses in science, math, and medical terminology and learn skills and knowledge critical for college success. They receive college credit and a weekly stipend.

Information: www.ohcc.org/progiov.html; 503-691-9088 x113

University of Montana, HCOP Summer program

Goal: To provide academic and nonacademic services for students who want to pursue a career in pharmacy, physical therapy, or other allied health sciences.

Description: Begun in 1993, the 6-week, residential summer program focuses on high-school juniors and seniors and first-year college students who are disadvantaged or from communities under-represented in health fields. Activities focus on exploring areas of academic and career interest, preparing for entry into graduate and professional programs, and exploring research and internship opportunities. UM professors mentor participants, who receive a stipend of \$55/day.

Information: www.umt.edu/hcop/main.htm; 406-243-4095

Yakima Farm Workers' Clinic/Northwest Community Action Center, ConneX Program

Goal: To introduce students to health careers and provide an opportunity to develop skills necessary to succeed in the health care field.

Description: ConneX conducts Saturday academies and a 6-week summer program directed toward educationally and economically disadvantaged students in nine local school districts. College students can participate in the summer program. Activities include a math and science camp, mentoring, internships, health career exploration, financial aid/scholarship information, and visits to university health career programs.

Information: 509-865-7630 x256

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Dept., Health Occupations Promotion Program

Goal: To provide high-school students a work experience in public health.

Description: Begun in 2001, the program focuses on students aged 14-19, particularly those enrolled in health occupation classes; about 70% are minority. Participants can work 2 months in the summer at 25-32 hrs/week; or 3-4 months during the school year at fewer hours/week. Activities include helping make education presentations and attending health promotion events. Participants receive an hourly pay of \$8-9/hr.

Information: 253-798-3484

Programs for Middle-School Students

University of Montana, HCOP Saturday Academy

Goal: To enrich students' academic experience and expose them to hands-on science.

Description: The program targets disadvantaged students in the 4th, 7th, and 10th grades who are interested in health profession careers or have an interest in science. Participants attend two 6-hour Saturday sessions. Activities include lectures, field trips, and exposure to role models in health careers. Participants receive a stipend and certificate of completion.

Information: www.umt.edu/hcop/main.htm; 406-243-4095

Veterans Administration, Partners Program

Goal: To introduce students to nursing and other health careers; to increase minorities in nursing and other health careers.

Description: Begun in 1996, this Seattle-based program targets students from a nearby middle school. Students work full-time in summer and part-time during the school year, receiving minimum wage salaries. Participants work on the wards doing basic nursing assistant work and can continue with the program through high school.

Information: www.puget-sound.med.va.gov/nurse/partners; 206-764-2626