
A Successful Community-Based Partnership: Formation and Achievements

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Abstract

The formation and achievements of an academic-community partnership between the Department of Nursing, College of Allied Health Professions, Temple University, and two Philadelphia public housing developments are the focus of this article. One community-developed, community-based public health initiative, Lead Awareness: North Philly Style, demonstrates the positive effect of the relationship.

In January 1995, the Department of Nursing and the Office of Community Relations of Temple University met as members of a newly formed Temple University Community Service Council. The Community Service Council was organized to develop a plan to connect the academic units with the university's urban mission, which included the development of service-learning programs to support academic programs and generate volunteerism. The Department of Nursing and the Office of Community Relations of Temple University built a partnership for health outreach with the Tenant Council of Norris Homes and Apartments. The Tenant Council and Philadelphia Housing Authority committed a five-bedroom apartment within the housing development for a permanent health center. The renovations were completed and Temple Health Connection (THC) opened its doors as a comprehensive primary care clinic providing accessible, affordable, high quality health services.

Linking Education, Practice and Research

Temple Health Connection is a community-based, academic nursing practice providing education, evidence-based practice, and practice-based research. In addition, THC is a site offering interdisciplinary education, practice, and research. The creation of the THC meets not only the needs of the community but also the needs of the students and Temple's health researchers. How to make such a partnership work to everyone's benefit has been the challenge of THC. As health professionals assume responsibility for providing community-based health care, Temple Health Connection provides Temple University with field experiences, which are jointly controlled by the residents and the university thus helping to ensure top-level experiences for the Temple students as well as top-level services for the residents. It also exposes Temple students to a clinical environment that incorporates novel and creative developments in the delivery of health care. Each year at least 140 undergraduate students and fifteen graduate students have clinical experiences at THC.

The Department of Nursing supports a model of constituent-driven education, service, and research, allowing the community's need for health care services to direct how the Department of Nursing meets its need for community-based clinical learning and/or research. A Community Advisory Committee was established with recognized neighborhood leaders prior to the opening. All service/educational placements and research or demonstration projects are reviewed and accepted by the Community Advisory Committee prior to implementation. Community members are involved in the writing and development of research and demonstration projects of the Department of Nursing. The policies for approving research state that the researcher must meet with the Community Advisory Committee, share their instruments and incentives with the committee, and receive the Committee's support. Several research projects have not been

supported by the Committee and therefore not approved. The Community Advisory Committee judges the research and the holistic, gender-sensitive, and timely health care provided at THC as very high on a scale of respect for the people of North Philadelphia.

Community Advisory Committee member and Norris Tenant Council President, Diane Gass says, "Having a clinic where you live is a gold mine." Tanya Farmer, also an Advisory Committee member, adds, "I dropped by to say hello and they were heartwarming with good hospitality." Another Advisory Committee member, Annette Dyer, Fairhill Apartments Tenant Council President member, states, " They listened and included us in the decision making from the beginning."

THC provides a full range of services, seeing 960 clients (3,120 encounters) for primary care and 5,162 clients (10,112 encounters) for disease prevention and health promotion in 1998. Since the early 1980s the Department (School) of Nursing within the College of Allied Health Professions of Temple University has met its mission to serve at-risk populations through community outreach in North Central Philadelphia. In 1992, two faculty members in the Department of Nursing, Rita Lourie and Neva White, did an analysis of emergency room visits, finding that most families did not have primary health care providers. Illness care and not health care was their accessible option. THC has focused on providing care to neighbors within walking distance, which includes approximately 59,400 people and 12,900 families. Seventy percent of the residents are African American, 25 percent are Latino and 2 percent are Asian. Unemployment is high; educational levels are low and the percent living below the poverty level is as high as 50 percent. Single women head 68 percent of the families. North Central Philadelphia is confronted by multiple health problems: teenage pregnancy, premature births, low-birth-weight babies, inadequate prenatal care, infant mortality, tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases, asthma and lead poisoning are more than double the rates for the city as a whole. Current community-based programming addresses lead poisoning, asthma, teen pregnancy, violence, substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, pre- and post-natal care and breastfeeding. With strong community partnerships and programs, THC is a neighborhood health care home for those who previously had none.

Community partnerships have been forged between THC and community members and agencies, which have long histories of serving North Central Philadelphia: Philadelphia Housing Authority, Neighborhood Action Bureau, Philadelphia Parent Child Center, Village of the Arts and Humanities, North Philadelphia Salvation Army chapters, Maternal Child Division, and Lead Poisoning Prevention Program of the city's health department. Research/demonstration funds from public sources (city, state and federal) and private foundations, as well as monies for providing care through third-party payers, have been successfully obtained. Through advocacy and education THC has moved from serving 60 percent uninsured during 1997 to 41 percent uninsured in 1998. THC has been supported by outside funders such as: Independence Foundation; National Institute for Nursing Research; Division of Nursing, Bureau of Health Professions of the Public Health Service; Environmental Protection Agency; Area Health Education Center; March of Dimes; American Lung Association; Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program; and Division of Early Childhood, Youth and Women's Health of the City of Philadelphia Health Department.

Impacts of the Partnership

Impact and outcomes are used to evaluate THC's success. Outcomes are the long-term ability to improve mortality and morbidity data, such as reductions in the number of capitated children without up-to-date immunization records; teen pregnancies; low-birth-weight infants; elevated lead levels; and days of school missed, days in the hospital, and emergency room visits due to asthma. Impact measures are shorter term evidence that the services provided at THC are positively affecting the population served, e.g., improved self esteem in children (five-eight years of age) participating in after school and camp programs; intention to abstain from sexual relationships until after finishing high school; increased numbers of teens seeking family planning prior to first sexual

contact; screening for and diagnosing chronic health problems early in their natural history and prior to permanent disability (in 60 percent of uninsured males); more women on successful family planning programs; and more women successfully breastfeeding. In addition, on the well validated Health Status Questionnaire (SF-12), which measures the clients' perception of their health, the population receiving care at THC has improved over time in the areas of physical functioning, bodily pain, energy and fatigue--and remained the same in the areas of role limitation physical and mental, social functioning, mental health and overall health perception. Patient satisfaction has been at 4.65 or greater on a five point scale addressing waiting time, time spent with the patient, explanation of health/illness from nurse practitioners, skill of staff, and ensuring patient privacy.

A New Model

One project that highlights THC's ability to respond creatively as a new model for health care delivery to underserved populations is our Lead Awareness: North Philly Style program, funded by the National Institute of Nursing Research. When the City of Philadelphia Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program approached THC about the possibility of submitting a grant to a National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, THC community partners not only came to the initial meeting, but also came to every meeting for six weeks to participate in the writing of the proposal. The proposed interventions were this community's interventions and when we received the word that we were funded, we "hit the ground running."

This is population-based research with experimental and control census tracts. The experimental and control census tracts have been matched for percentage of the population that is African American and lives below the poverty level, as well as the percentage of houses build before 1950. There are two aims/objectives:

1. To test community-developed, community-based prevention/intervention strategies that will increase knowledge regarding the environmental health risk of childhood lead poisoning; and
2. To test community-developed, community-based prevention/intervention strategies that will increase hazard, exposure and outcome surveillance for lead as an environmental agent.

A telephone survey was completed prior to implementation of all the proposed strategies. Using a pre-tested anonymous telephone questionnaire, the survey was directed to a random sample (n=112) from the target population of experimental (154, 155, 165, 166) and control (130, 141, 175, 202) census tracts. Respondents were 75 percent female, 25 percent male. Tabulations of each question comparing experimental and control groups indicated no significant differences in awareness levels between the test and control census tracts. Overall lead poisoning awareness is low. For example, only 3 of 48 in the experimental census tracts and 9 out of 64 in the control census tracts listed lead poisoning as the number one childhood health problem in their neighborhood. Most knew that a blood test is required to determine lead poisoning. Most respondents (75 percent) indicated that they lived in houses greater than 20 years old. Most considered lead poisoning to be "somewhat serious" (55 percent) or "very serious" (35 percent). Paint was considered the most important source of lead (84 percent), followed by water (4 percent) in an open-ended question. When asked to "rank" sources of lead, paint was first (46 percent), followed by water (36 percent) and dust (10 percent).

Interventions were designed by community advisors: after school/camp programs to educate children, followed by informational "block parties" in local churches and recreation centers with adults. Nursing faculty and graduate and undergraduate students have been active participants in both the after-school and camp programs and the "block parties" as well as participants in collecting data and data entry. The Tenant Council Presidents of Norris Homes and Apartments and Fairhill

Apartments are part of this grant's staff, acknowledging the essential nature of their participation. Taking responsibility for the guest list and the responses to the invitations, our community partners have enabled us to reach the after-school and camp programs in the experimental census tracts and to request neighborhood Block Captains to host the informational "block parties" for adults. Focused upon lead poisoning prevention, the Village of the Arts and Humanities has developed innovative strategies, e.g., a puppet show; rap music; lead chants; photography; and design of T-shirts, table cloths, place mats, aprons, wash cloths, towels and dust cloths.

THC has been able to document a 27 percent increase in numbers of children tested for lead poisoning in the experimental census tracts as compared to a 10 percent increase in the control census tracts, based upon data from the Lead Poisoning Prevention Program of the Philadelphia Health Department. There has been a 6 percent reduction in children with lead levels greater than 14 micrograms per deciliter and a 10 percent reduction in children with lead levels greater than 19 micrograms per deciliter in the experimental census tracts. In the control census tracts, there has been a reduction of 2 percent for lead levels over 14 micrograms per deciliter and 1 percent for lead levels over 19 micrograms per deciliter.

Conclusion

With all of the tremendous social and health related problems that North Central Philadelphia faces, THC has found a community with great spirit, willing to invest energy toward improving their children's future. The enthusiastic involvement of community advisors from this neighborhood in designing community-based, community-developed interventions, e.g., Lead Awareness: North Philly Style, is the driving force behind any current and future success in meeting program outcomes at Temple Health Connection.

There are four factors that have made this kind of partnership possible:

1. We consider the community more than an equal partner.
2. Over the past ten years, as a department within the university, we have listened and directed our programs to reflect the community's interpretation of its needs.
3. We foster close interpersonal relations among the community members and the health professional partners.
4. Over time trust has been established allowing each party the ability to talk out problems and concerns without fear of another party "walking away from the table."

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