

2 health systems advancing population health via collaboration

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Lawrence Prybil, Norton Professor in Healthcare Leadership in the College of Public Health at the University of Kentucky

Amy Vance, senior vice president of Population Health with Novant Health

Phyllis Wingate, president of Carolinas HealthCare System NorthEast

Anne McGeorge, National Managing Partner of Grant Thornton LLP's Health Care practice

Improving community health as a fundamental mission for nonprofit hospitals and health systems, and measuring the impact was described by local leaders as well as by the leader of a study of these kinds of collaborations.

Ways to achieve success were shared by Phyllis Wingate, president of Carolinas HealthCare System NorthEast, and Amy Vance, senior vice president of Population Health with Novant Health. An overview of 12 highly successful multisector partnerships was provided by Dr. Lawrence Prybil, Norton Professor in Healthcare Leadership in the College of Public Health at the University of Kentucky.

The forum was the Healthcare Provider Conference, which brought health care and business professionals to Charlotte, N.C. for a fall 2015 gathering co-sponsored by Grant Thornton LLP, AON and McGuireWoods LLP. One of the topics — population health — was addressed by Wingate, Vance and Prybil, and moderated by Anne McGeorge, national managing partner of Grant Thornton's Health Care practice.

Successful collaborations offer lessons and recommendations

Prybil began the session by discussing the multisector partnerships across the country his team studied and reported on in *Improving Community Health through Hospital-Public Health Collaborations*.¹ The reason providers need to work with public health and other sectors, he said, is to lift health to a higher level: “America’s health care expenditures per capita are higher than in all other developed nations, but we lag behind them on multiple measures of population health. We can continue to increase our investment in health and medical services, but we’re never going to really improve the health of our American population in any significant way unless we address the other determinants. That’s why we need to forge partnerships.”



¹ Prybil, Lawrence, et al. *Improving Community Health through Hospital-Public Health Collaborations*, Commonwealth Center for Governance Studies Inc., November 2014. See www.grantthornton.com/healthcollaboration for the report.

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He went on to describe key characteristics of successful partnerships and provide five recommendations for creating an effective collaboration:

1. Focus on clearly defined community health needs that will inspire broad-based interest and support.
2. Build partnerships with parties that have mutual respect, trust and commitment to the partnership's mission and goals.
3. For long-term success, partnerships need to generate sustainable funding, including one or more "anchor institutions," such as health systems, that have deep dedication to the partnership's mission and commitment to provide ongoing financial support for it.
4. All partnerships focused on improving community health should develop clear metrics and targets, continually assess progress toward those targets, and prepare evidence-based impact statements for all stakeholders and the community at large.
5. Hospitals and health systems should establish standing board committees with oversight responsibility for their organization's involvement in addressing community health needs and community benefit strategies, programs and impact.

Healthy Cabarrus assesses community needs, takes action

The longest-lived collaboration studied by Prybil's team is Healthy Cabarrus, anchored by the Carolinas HealthCare System NorthEast, a regional 457-bed not-for-profit medical center that is the largest employer in the Concord, N.C., area.

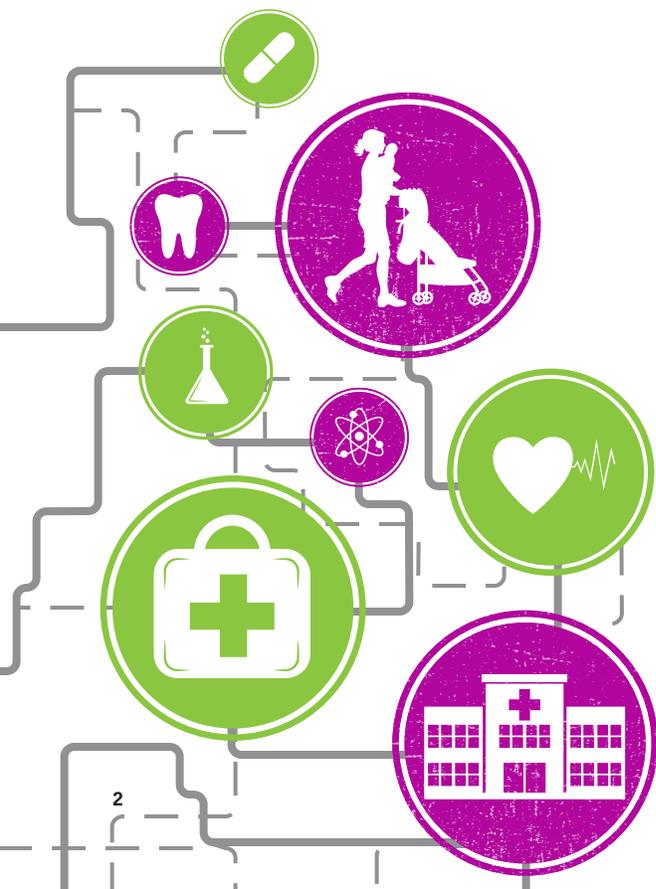
The mission of Healthy Cabarrus, Wingate said, is "to unite through partnerships and commit the time, talents and financial resources of partners to create a healthy community and hope for all."

She described the collaboration's structure and the factors in its success, starting with the fact that it's a voluntary partnership, not a separate 501(c)(3). It operates through an advisory board that comprises representatives from the religious community, the government, the hospital itself and other not-for-profits across the community. There are two dedicated staff members, and they receive additional support from staff of the local health department.

One of Healthy Cabarrus' functions is conducting the community needs assessment (CNA). "In Cabarrus County, I think it is visionary that the health department decided that the community health needs assessment for Cabarrus County would be a community assessment recognizing that the social determinants of health were important, and that the assessment needed to look beyond health outcomes to social factors that impacted the health outcome of our community," Wingate said.

In response to the CNA conducted by Healthy Cabarrus, the state health department identified four to six priorities and, working through Healthy Cabarrus, appointed task forces to develop and oversee action plans. The task forces report their plans to an advisory board, which assists in the implementation of the plans.

Two results of tackling items in the CNA are the reduction of the county's infant mortality rate to 5.5/1,000 live births (down from 17.1/1,000 eight years ago and half the statewide rate) and the creation of a public transportation system.



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Under development is an initiative to address another item on the CNA list: reducing childhood obesity. Carolinas HealthCare System NorthEast funded a study of the country's best practices. "We brought together a group of stakeholders that would help us to address this problem, recognizing that it would not be solved within the walls of the hospital and recognizing that we needed business partners, the school systems, families to be involved," said Wingate. Healthy Cabarrus provided an ideal partner to further this work, and a task force and subcommittee are now working on solving this problem for the next generation.

According to Wingate, there are four main contributors to the collaboration's success:

1. Strong leadership and the right partners, including the advisory board
 - Individuals on the advisory board are all involved in a "management or a technical expert area where they have access to senior leadership and can impact the execution of plans," Wingate explained.
2. A culture of collaboration
 - There's a "history of effectiveness," said Wingate. "People have stayed engaged, and there's a culture of collaboration that's very evident in our community, built up over time because we've actually had some wins and some successes and made a difference."
3. Innovativeness of the health department
 - "They are very broad in their thinking, and they're visionary in their thinking," Wingate said. "They're very open to working on issues. They're open to different points of view."
4. Creative funding
 - Partnering with the local health department is again key in that grant writing has been effective. "They're very creative in getting funds and support to execute on the plans that are developed," Wingate explained.

In a true collaboration such as Healthy Cabarrus, partners step forward to meet needs that others in the collaboration might not be equipped to handle. An example, said Wingate, is the obstetrics clinic, operated by the local health department, that had also lost county funding and needed help to continue providing comprehensive clinic services such as interpreters. Wingate's hospital worked with the clinic on a reorganization, sent medical residents to work in the clinic and gave a one-time stipend. As a result, the clinic is now self-sustaining.

Novant Health leverages data to identify needs, measure results

Collaborative work in keeping with its mission statement — "to improve the health of our communities, one person at a time" — is led by Novant Health, a four-state integrated network of physician clinics, outpatient centers and hospitals headquartered in Winston-Salem, N.C.

"Essentially, what Novant Health has been doing in the last two years around this concept of population health is building our internal capabilities and scaling so that we can really begin to make differences in the outcomes in the communities and the people that we serve," explained Vance.

