



Academic Health Department Learning Community Meeting

December 8, 2011

SUMMARY

Overview of Academic Health Department (AHD) Learning Community Initiative

- The [Academic Health Department \(AHD\) Learning Community](#) is an initiative of the [Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health Practice](#) to bring practitioners, educators, and researchers together to share knowledge and collaborate on resources to support the development, maintenance, and expansion of AHDs. Funding for the Learning Community is provided by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and the [Health Resources and Services Administration](#), and the Learning Community is guided by the [AHD Workgroup](#).
- The Learning Community holds 90 minute conference call meetings approximately quarterly.
- Information about the Learning Community is available online at <http://www.pfh.org/programs/AHDLC>. Materials for this meeting are located on the [meeting webpage](#).
- Questions and suggestions may be sent to Kathleen at kamos@phf.org.

Developing, Sustaining, and Expanding AHDs: Case Studies of Successful AHD Partnerships

Jefferson County (AL) Department of Health: Bryn Manzella, Director of Quality Improvement

- [Bryn Manzella, MPH](#), of the Jefferson County (AL) Department of Health (JCDH), discussed how JCDH grew from a single partnership into a comprehensive AHD with multiple affiliation agreements.
- Although the full list of criteria that may be present in an AHD can seem overwhelming, organizations may already display many of these characteristics through informal relationships and it only takes one successful partnership to spur AHD development.
- JCDH began developing as an AHD in 1991, when it established a public health dietetics preceptorship for nutrition students at the University of Alabama. In 1994, JCDH signed a formal affiliation agreement with the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) School of Public Health. JCDH collaborates with UAB and several other academic institutions on efforts such as teaching, curriculum development, internships, medical rotations, and a pharmacy/public health residency program. JCDH has partnerships with programs of public health, medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, and nutrition, and hopes to add nursing in the future.
- JCDH's strategic plan identifies being an AHD as a way to ensure organizational excellence.
- Partnerships evolve over time and even long-standing AHD relationships need attention. In 2010, 16 years after signing their original agreement, JCDH signed a new agreement with UAB to stimulate more joint research and collaboration.

Knox County (TN) Health Department-University of Tennessee Department of Public Health: Charles Hamilton, Professor & Director, MPH Program, Department of Public Health, University of Tennessee

- Charles Hamilton, DrPH, MPH, of the University of Tennessee–Knoxville (UTK), outlined the evolution of the AHD relationship between the Knox County (TN) Health Department (KCHD) and UTK from informal partnerships to a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed in March 2011.
- Long before signing the MOU, KCHD and UTK participated in informal partnerships encompassing activities such as providing internships and service learning opportunities, hosting guest lectures, assisting with UTK's reaccreditation, and serving on joint

committees. Individuals from both institutions also participated in the East Tennessee Forum on Public Health and Preventive Medicine, a forum for educators and practitioners to network and discuss their projects and goals.

- The AHD MOU includes provisions for shared personnel, including an AHD Coordinator who was jointly hired by both organizations to serve as a primary point of contact and coordinate AHD activities, as well as educational activities, such as quarterly Public Health Grand Rounds to promote information exchange between educators and practitioners.
- Both institutions believe their AHD relationship strengthens the public health workforce, improves its capacity to provide public health services, and supports accreditation efforts.

Other Success Stories?

- [Eric Gass, PhD](#), Public Health Research and Policy Director at the City of Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) and Adjunct Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (UWM) School of Public Health shared his institutions' progress on building their partnership. Since launching three years ago, the UWM School of Public Health has collaborated with MHD to appoint adjunct faculty and apply for joint funding. A shared building to house faculty and staff from both institutions is planned.
- Successful AHDs benefit from champions, individuals passionate about AHDs and able to effectively articulate the benefits of formal partnerships. AHD champions can be city mayors, health department directors, academic department chairs, or other individuals committed to strengthening the connections between academia and public health practice.
- Academic and practice organizations often have different systems and cultures. To address potential barriers, it may be helpful to create a neutral space for individuals from different backgrounds to build trust and identify common goals. Prior to forming an AHD, Northeast Ohio Medical University established an office of public health practice, giving practitioners access to academic facilities and helping educators build ties with the local community.

Future of the AHD Workgroup

- The [AHD Workgroup](#) was formed to guide the development of the AHD Learning Community. The question of whether the AHD Workgroup remains necessary and relevant or whether the Learning Community as a whole should drive its further development was posed. No opposition to dissolving the AHD Workgroup was expressed, but all Learning Community members will be given a chance to share their views.
- Staff will send an email to Learning Community members requesting input on the future of the AHD Workgroup.

Next Steps

- Since its launch in January 2011, the AHD Learning Community has grown to over 100 members and held four meetings.
- All Learning Community members are encouraged to create a [Learning Community Profile](#) and begin sharing their experiences. A brief summary of your AHD involvement will help others identify potential contacts for their questions or ideas.
- The Learning Community is compiling a list of AHDs, as well as a collection of partnership agreements that established those AHDs. Additions are welcome.
- Members of the Learning Community are encouraged to communicate between meetings, either directly or by contacting Kathleen at kamos@phf.org with questions or suggestions.
- Suggestions are appreciated at any time for meeting agenda topics or communication tools.
- Please continue to encourage others to join the Learning Community. The more people involved, the greater the potential benefit for everyone.
- The next Learning Community meeting will likely occur in spring 2012.