



Academic Health Department Learning Community Meeting

November 1, 2011

## SUMMARY

### Introducing the Academic Health Department (AHD) Learning Community and the AHD Model

- 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 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](#).
- Since its formation in January 2011, the Learning Community has grown to nearly 90 members.
- An AHD is formed by the affiliation of a health department and an academic health professions institution. This collaborative relationship aims to enhance public health education and training, service provision, and research. AHD partnerships can vary in both formality and degree of collaboration and may include the sharing of resources, personnel, and expertise.
- Formal AHD partnerships may develop from a need for collaboration in a specific area, such as providing students with practical experience, and may build on pre-existing relationships between academic and public health practice institutions. AHDs promote increased collaboration between the academic and practice sides of public health.

### AHD Case Studies

- AHD Workgroup Chair C. William Keck, MD, MPH led a discussion of the development of AHDs, which featured the stories of two formal AHD partnerships.

#### *Established Academic Health Department*

- Bryn Manzella, MPH, Director of Quality Improvement for the Jefferson County (AL) Department of Health (JCHD), shared the experiences of JCHD as it developed from a single partnership into a comprehensive AHD with multiple academic affiliations.
- JCHD's story began in 1991 with the establishment of a preceptorship in public health dietetics for students at the University of Alabama. Since then, internships have also been provided for students in public health and pharmacy; academic rotations have been offered in dentistry, dental hygiene, and medicine; the first pharmacy/public health residency in the country was created; collaborative research activities have been undertaken; and the provision of services in such areas as optometry, dentistry, and infectious and chronic disease has been enhanced.
- In 1994, JCHD and the University of Alabama at Birmingham's School of Public Health formalized their AHD relationship with an affiliation agreement that provides for a joint advisory committee, cross-appointment of personnel, educational activities for students, cooperation in service delivery and curriculum development, and research collaboration.
- JCHD's current strategic plan highlights being an AHD as a way to ensure organizational excellence.
- Participating in AHD partnerships has proved beneficial in a variety of areas including increasing student exposure to and appreciation for working in public health, identifying the best students for future jobs, and weathering the economic downturn.
- Key lessons from the JCHD experience include looking for natural synergies between organizations, building on small successes, recognizing the importance of time and the right partners, and emphasizing the AHD within the organization's strategic plan. It only takes one person with one great idea to get an AHD started.

November 16, 2011

### *New Academic Health Department*

- Charles Hamilton, DrPH, MPH, Professor and Director of the MPH program at the University of Tennessee (UT), described the development of the recent AHD partnership between the UT Department of Public Health and the Knox County (TN) Health Department (KCHD).
- The UT-KCHD partnership was formalized in March 2011 with the signing of a memorandum of understanding, but the two organizations have long collaborated informally through such activities as internships, service learning programs, adjunct faculty positions, and workforce development and accreditation activities.
- The two organizations worked together to hire an AHD Coordinator who serves both institutions. Some of her responsibilities include contributing to workforce development activities, coordinating internships, and serving as a primary point of contact for the AHD.
- Formalizing the partnership has benefited UT and KCHD in numerous ways, among them strengthening existing relationships and creating new ones, engaging faculty and students in public health practice, providing access to a broader range of expertise for improving community health, and positioning the partners for joint funding opportunities.
- Challenges in developing the AHD have included concerns about the value of partnering, finding funding for an AHD Coordinator, fostering practice-focused research, and enhancing sustainability of the AHD. Communication, flexibility, and creativity have been key to making the AHD work.

### *AHDs in Progress?*

- AHDs are not formed overnight, but develop over time as people and organizations build relationships. AHDs often begin small and informally; a formal agreement is not needed to start developing an AHD. Many institutions already employ aspects of the AHD model and may do so for many years before formalizing a partnership.
- Begin by collaborating with people and departments with which your organization already has good relationships. This may be especially helpful when working in larger organizations.
- AHD partnerships need champions from all organizations involved. Be that champion and work with your counterparts in other organizations to build strong relationships.
- Making the AHD partnership an integral part of an organization's strategic plan helps underscore its importance for the organizations involved.

### **AHD Learning Community**

- The AHD Learning Community serves to encourage learning, facilitate discussion, and offer support, all within the context of building and strengthening AHD relationships.
- The Learning Community is working to compile and develop resources that will help professionals develop, sustain, and expand AHDs. Information about the Learning Community and its resources can be accessed through the [Learning Community webpage](#).
- News articles, blog posts, meeting information, and profiles of Learning Community members are also available online. All Learning Community members and those interested in joining the Learning Community are encouraged to create a [Learning Community Profile](#) and begin sharing their experiences.
- The Learning Community is currently working to build a list of AHDs, as well as a collection of the partnerships agreements that established those AHDs.
- Please encourage others to join the Learning Community. The more people involved, the greater the potential benefit for everyone.
- The Learning Community will next meet by conference call on December 8, 2011 from 2:30-4:00 pm EST.
- The slides used in this presentation may be accessed [here](#).
- Any questions or suggestions may be sent to Kathleen at [kamos@phf.org](mailto:kamos@phf.org).