

## **Bringing Two Worlds Closer: A Three-Year Review of Council Activities**

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In 1998, the Institute of Medicine issued its report, *The Future of Public Health*, which identified the gap between academic public health and practice, and the contribution this gap made to the disarray of public health. A group of concerned individuals and institutions convened the Public Health Faculty/Agency Forum (the Forum) to address this gap, and to recommend ways of closing it. These recommendations were developed into the Forum's final report<sup>1</sup>, as well as in universal and discipline-specific public health competencies.

Facilitating the implementation of these recommendations became the task of the Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health Practice (the Council), established in 1991. Council members include representatives from national public health academic and practice organizations. Considerable progress has been made toward implementing many of the Forum's recommendations; below is a highlight of the activities of the Council over the past three years.

### **Objectives, actions, and accomplishments**

The overall goal of the Council is to improve the relevance of public health education to practice, specifically through continued refinement and implementation of the Forum recommendations. These recommendations focus on four areas:

- Strengthening relationships between academic public health and public health practitioners in public agencies;
- Improving the teaching, training, and practice of public health;
- Establishing firm practice links between schools of public health and other public health academic programs and public agencies; and,
- Collaborating with others to achieve the nation's Year 2000 health objectives (or, more currently, Year 2010 health objectives).

The development of specific objectives, and the continued activities of the Council on Linkages, guides the further implementation of Forum recommendations. Specific objectives and progress in forwarding these objectives include:

### **Objective 1: Encourage Linkages Between Agencies and Academia**

This includes support for public health educational programs that are engaged in collaborative research with community health practitioners, and the creation of public health practice offices/programs in academic institutions that are dedicated to strengthening ties with practice organizations. Related actions and accomplishments include:

- *Public health practice research agenda*: Began the development of a national public health practice research agenda (1998). Formed a core group of five individuals to further develop the scope and framework (1998). Presented the modified concept paper explaining the agenda to the Public Health Functions Working Group and Steering Committee (1998), where it was accepted. Submitted a proposal to conduct feasibility testing of the research agenda framework (1999). Presented the framework

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<sup>1</sup> Sorenson, A. and Bialek, R. eds., *Linking Graduate Education and Practice: A final report of the Public Health Faculty/Agency Forum*. University Press of Florida. Available from [www.phf.org](http://www.phf.org).

- at the American Public Health Association Annual Meeting session on developing a national public health practice research agenda (1999).
- *Preventive medicine residencies* Helped develop and support member organization initiatives for funding preventive medicine residencies and programs to establish “prevention point persons” in medical schools (1997, 1998).
  - *Cooperative ventures with graduate schools of public health*: Ongoing work with the Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH, a Council member) Council of Public Health Practice Coordinators (PHPC) to implement white papers on demonstrating excellence in academic public health practice (1999). Co-sponsor (with ASPH) of the newly-developed Award for Student Excellence in Public Health Practice (1999).

### **Objective 2: Enhance the Relevance of Public Health Education**

The Council works to enhance the quality of public health education by encouraging the incorporation of nationally agreed-upon public health competencies in the curriculum and accreditation of all public health programs by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH). Related actions and accomplishments include:

- *Public health competencies*: Leadership and ongoing involvement in the Public Health Functions Working Group (PHFWG) workforce subcommittee. The Council was identified in the 1997 report, *The Public Health Workforce: An Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, for its work in the competencies area. A new initiative to refine and validate core public health competencies recently began, building on the work of the Council and many others over the past decade (1999).
- *Application of competencies*: Competencies developed by the Council are being used by Tulane University and the University of Pittsburgh’s HRSA-funded regional training centers. Their uses include workforce needs assessment and curriculum development (1999).
- *Accreditation*: Submitted recommendations to CEPH which promote and encourage academic/practice linkages in revised accreditation criteria for schools of public health (1999).

### **Objective 3: Track Academic/Practice Linkages**

The Council is involved in ongoing monitoring of practice linkages in schools of public health and accredited graduate programs in its activities related to Objective 1 and 2. Related actions and accomplishments include working closely with the PHPC Council of ASPH, and providing assistance as requested (ongoing).

### **Objective 4: Train the Public Health Workforce**

The Council collaborates with others to secure training resources sufficient to develop a competent public health workforce able to achieve the public health core functions and essential community services. Activities related to that objective include:

- Working with medical specialty organizations to promote funding for public health training of medical school residents (1998).
- Formally endorse and publicly support the goals of the report *Preparing Currently Employed Public Health Professionals for Changes in the Health System*, including

letter of commendation and invitation to collaborate on future work to Dr. Kristine Gebbie (1998).

- Prepared official comments on the “Infrastructure” chapter of *Healthy People 2010*, and recommended to Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher that the chapter be given greater prominence in the document and the research objectives be maintained.

### **Objective 5: Disseminate Information About Academic/Practice Linkages**

Gathering and disseminating information on academic/practice linkage experiences and activities is a vital component of Council activities, and the council has been at the forefront of this area for many years. Activities related to this objective include:

- Ongoing publication of *The Link* (1991 – present), with fivefold increase in circulation over those years.
- Presentation of the annual Linkages Awards for excellence in development and implementation of academic/practice linkages (ongoing since 1996).
- Session at APHA annual meeting on creating academic health departments (1998).
- Prepared and distributed promotional brochure at 20 national meetings, to further the awareness of Council activities and to promote interest in academic/practice linkages (1999).
- Launched the Council on Linkages website – [www.phf.org/Link.htm](http://www.phf.org/Link.htm) (1998).
- Adopted the Council logo and applied for official copyright (1998).
- Promotion of linkage activities at national meetings through the Council’s new booth display (ongoing) and as part of the HRSA exhibit at the 1999 APHA annual meeting.

### **Objective 6: Share/Develop Practice Guidelines**

As discussed in this issue of *The Link*, the Council demonstrated the feasibility and desirability of developing public health practice guidelines. This led to the national effort under the direction of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to develop the *Guide to Community Preventive Services*. The Council remains active in this area and has strongly advocated that the *Guide* be pilot-tested with practitioners and academics as part of its goal to ensure the development and dissemination of effective community preventive services guidelines (1996 – present).

### **Objective 7: Academic Training For Public Health Practitioners**

Working with public health practice associations, the Council actively promotes and identifies training initiatives of the practice community that involve academic organizations. These activities include:

- Recommended that the Institute of Medicine, in revisiting the 1998 report, *The Future of Public Health*, consider the following: 1) developing a “bare-minimum” definition of the functions of local health departments; and 2) determining ways to assess and model the public health infrastructure, in order to make recommendations for achieving Healthy People 2010 objectives (1998).
- Promoted creation of academic health departments through development and presentation of a concept paper, data collection and analysis related to the current status of academic health departments, and a session at the APHA annual meeting (1998).

- Developed a survey tool to document different relationships between health departments and academic institutions (1999).
- Worked with the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) to develop strategies which result in practitioners and faculty using NCHS data for research, development, and evaluation of public health practice programs (1999).
- Conducting a demonstration project to promote and formalize linkages in Ohio, by bringing together the Ohio Association of County Health Officials, academic public health institutions, and the Ohio health department (1999 – present).

### **Objective 8: Linkages With The Medical Field**

Fostering collaboration between public health and clinical professions and supporting the teaching of relevant population-based health principles in clinical curricula has been accomplished, in part, through the addition of three new member organizations: the Society for Public Health Education (1998), the National Environmental Health Association (1999), and the National Association of Local Boards of Health (1999).

### **Objective 9: Public Health Performance Standards**

The council seeks to advance a national agenda for the development, testing and implementation of public health system performance standards, with special attention to building the evidence base for accountability and quality improvement. This recently adopted objective involves: 1) linking academic institutions with key players and field testing sites for the National Public Health Performance Standards Program; 2) establishing Public Health practice Research Forum to promote development of public health practice research methods and building of the evidence base; 3) seeking to sponsor with other academic and practice organizations an annual public health practice scientific meeting.

### **A new century/looking ahead...**

As we enter a new decade, the Council can be proud of its accomplishments. It also recognizes that the new decade will be filled with even greater needs, opportunities, and challenges for academic/practice linkages.

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