

Summary
Physical and Mental Health Committee
July 24, 2006

Media Center
Clarke Central High School

Attendees:

Howard Stroud
Katie Calkin
Claude Burnett
Judy Hibbs
Lisa Sharling
Susie Smith
Becky McCaskey
Emuel Aldridge
Natalie Arford
Jolene O'Guin
Patricia Thomas
Deb Williams
Michelle Estile
Jim Youngquist

James Shrum
Bernard Wheatley
Jennifer Richardson
Carol McChesney
Sarah Himmelheber
Pat Scholtzhauer
Juana Gnecco
Meredith Camp
Marcia Massengill
Lauren Rapp
Shelby Lacy
Erin Sullivan
Lila Ralston

Welcome and Update

Committee Howard Stroud welcomed everyone to the July meeting of the Physical and Mental Health Committee. He pointed out that Steering Committee was working towards the release of an interim report for August 24th. It is the assignment of the committee to use this meeting to consider priorities and points of importance in the area of Physical and Mental Health issues facing Athens-Clarke County. He said while there had been a lot of work completed by the committee, more study and discussion was needed. He pointed out such questions of what percentage of those living below the poverty level had insurance? What percentage of employers offered insurance to their employees? What do the health insurance programs of the top 5-10 employers in Athens-Clarke County look like? To get the discussion going for the evening, he called on James Shrum to present the initial findings of the committee that would be the basis of discussion for adding, deleting, and adjusting to the important issues and focus for this committee's work.

Mission Statement

James Shrum began his presentation by providing the mission statement/goal of the committee. The initial statement/goal is "the promotion of physical and mental health for the economically oppressed." James said that he and others did not like the word "oppressed". He suggested that it be substituted for with the word "disadvantaged" or "challenged". He asked that the support staff come up with a revised mission statement for consideration and adoption at the August meeting.

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Initial Issues

The initial issue areas identified by the committee specific to the uninsured and underinsured populations of children, adolescents, adults, homeless, chronically ill and disabled, the elderly, pregnant women and infants. The ten issue areas were:

- Access to Primary Care
- Access to Specialty Care
- Chronic Illness Care
- Dental Care
- Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, including Suicide Prevention
- Nutrition/Adolescent Obesity
- Physical Rehabilitation (PT, OT)
- Prescription Assistance
- Spiritual Health
- Transportation to Health Providers

General discussion took place regarding the ten issues. The consensus was that these were all important issues. The group agreed that the only missing issue area was:

- Family Planning (Teenage Pregnancy Prevention and future planning)

Learnings/ Proposed Priorities

To date, the committee had identified five learnings/proposed priorities. Those priorities were:

1. There are only a few primary health care providers (Athens Neighborhood Health Center, Athens Nurses Clinic, Mercy Center, and **Public Family**) that serve the population in question. Moreover, they are underfunded and seriously hampered in their efforts to meet the needs of an ever-increasing number of clients.
2. There are **inadequate** no resources in the community for the provision of dental care to the uninsured.

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3. Multiple financial demands for food, housing and transportation compete with prescription costs.
4. Healthcare for undocumented immigrants is threatened due to potential legislation.
5. Too few physicians have born the burden of providing **primary population and** specialty care.

The group present at the meeting offered adjustments to the learnings/proposed priorities as highlighted in bold italic.

Additionally, the group noted the importance of addressing learnings for all of the ten issues. It was further noted that their needed to be learnings considered wherever services are provided, not provided, and underserved.

Facilitated Session:

Jim Youngquist, faculty member at The Fanning Institute, was called upon to facilitate the group discussion. The group was asked to address the issue areas that they felt were important learnings/proposed priorities.

Dental Care

Dental care to the underinsured and uninsured is offered at Athens Tech (cleanings) and Mercy. Some dentists in town will take on a few uninsured patients. There is a mobile unit that comes to the Clarke County Schools. Dental care is also available at the Nurses Clinic.

Physical Rehabilitation

There is no place in Athens-Clarke County that provides physical therapy without insurance

Transportation to Health Providers

The Council of Aging operates vans for the elderly to health providers. Some of the "Helping Agencies" have their own vans. In the past some of the agencies have provided tokens for transportation to health providers. Community Connections provides some transportations options.

Prescription Assistance

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It is the immediate prescriptions need that is the challenge not the long-term prescription needs. Health Solutions of Georgia has an annual membership fee then a fee for prescriptions of \$17 for 3 months. Mercy and The Arch provide prescription assistance.

Substance Abuse

There are inadequate resources for people without income. There is not a detox unit in Athens-Clarke County. There are Recovery Houses, but rent is charged. There are inadequate beds and in-patient services for women...no residences. Adolescent help has to be found out of state. Forty to 50% of the substance abuse patients also have mental health issues yet; there is no collaboration between service providers. The lack of coordination goes across the board between physical and mental health issues.

Family Planning

A lot more outreach is needed. It has always been underfunded and now, it has suffered from even further cuts. There is a documented history of teenage pregnancy leading to poverty. There was a Sex Education Committee for the community through the sponsorship of the school system; however, it has not operated in several years. There is a real need for this education geared from both a female and male perspective. Planning for the future and self-esteem cannot be fostered enough. Organizations providing family planning assistance and encouragement are Midwife, Teen Matters, Clarke County Health Department, the Athens Neighborhood Health Center, and Youth Leadership Academy.

Overarching Concepts

The group identified three overarching concepts during the facilitated session. The concepts were:

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- **Prevention:** There is too much emphasis on medicine instead of early education regarding behavior, nutrition, diet, and food budgeting. There needs to be an identification of resources that are available (a number of them we might not know about). The National Association of Mental Health provides mental Health Prevention programs. Currently, prevention programs exists through the Mercy Clinic, Nurses' Clinic, the school system, the health department, and the Healthy Community Coalition.

- **Race:** What role does it play in physical and mental health provision in Athens-Clarke County. The various races have sometime differing health beliefs. Trust is a key element with regard to attitudes towards the medical establishment. Maybe a survey of cultural anthropologist is in order. Undocumented workers are another aspect of the question. Language and communication barriers are a significant issue.

- **Central Clearinghouse:** It was noted that we really need a central clearinghouse or center, a one-stop shop if you will, for physical and mental health service provision and assistance for the underinsured and uninsured in Athens-Clarke County. "We are the service providers and we don't even know about all the services or how to tell the clients how to obtain them." An example that was cited was the Gateway Center in Atlanta.

Next Steps:

- James Shrum volunteered to host a work session with volunteers Claude Burnett, Lila Ralston, Erin Sullivan, and Susie Smith to take the learnings/proposed priorities that had previously been developed and those discussed at the meeting, and, try to develop five specific priorities to present in August.

- Chair Stroud is requesting that Jim Geisler make a presentation on the community conversations/meetings that are being held throughout Athens-Clarke County specifically focusing in on the physical and mental health findings.

- Chair Stroud ask that the participants take a look at mission/goal statement and present options for expansion if appropriate and submit those to Leigh Askew and/or Jim Youngquist at The Fanning Institute so that they can be presented at the August meeting.

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- Chair Stroud also asked that Dr. Burnett, and, representatives from the two hospitals and Wellstar be present at the next meeting to offer their perspectives on the state of physical and mental health provision in Athens-Clarke County for the targeted audience and in general.