

HEALTHY COLLABORATIONS

Institute to Benefit Students, Community

While colleges and universities have the core mission of preparing their students for successful careers and lives, the institutions also are key factors in community and regional development.

With both goals in mind, leaders at the University of Evansville (UE) are launching the Institute for Public Health.

Payal Patel-Dovlatabadi, associate professor and director of the undergraduate and graduate programs in public health at UE, terms the institute an extension of the Masters of Public Health (MPH) program that began two years ago.

“To go along with that, we wanted to develop some type of entity or organization these graduate students could get involved with, have that hands-on practical experience,” she shares. “At the same time, we will bring together faculty from different disciplines and also involve community leaders to identify top priorities, share ideas and take actions – to try and come up with solutions.”

The broad approach will feature a variety of university disciplines: sociology, psychology, communications and Spanish, to name a few. Partners will include the developing Indiana University School of Medicine downtown campus, clinicians from local hospitals, nonprofits (American Red Cross, Smoke Free Evansville, Vanderburgh County Health Department), mental health clinics and more.

Although the first collaborative meeting will take place in September, Patel-Dovlatabadi says there are some obvious areas of need. “Vanderburgh County has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the state of Indiana and also in the country, so that’s definitely going to be a target issue. Mental health has also been identified as a huge issue.

“We hope our Masters of Public Health students will have priority with engaging with the Institute. It will primarily be through research type efforts. (The) MPH (program) really wants to strengthen their research skills because that’s so important whether they go out into the workforce or they decide to go get a doctorate.”

UE already has some undergraduate students engaged in the community, assisting the county health department with data collection.

“Long term, I think our ultimate goal is to improve quality of life and help eliminate health disparities – where low income and certain types of races are more affected,” Patel-Dovlatabadi contends. “We want to improve health outcomes. We’re really excited about this opportunity. It’s a great addition for UE and the community.”



Beginning her eighth year at the University of Evansville, Payal Patel-Dovlatabadi started both the undergraduate and graduate public health programs.

RESOURCE: Payal Patel-Dovlatabadi, University of Evansville, at www.evansville.edu

Assessing the Needs and Taking Action

Every three years, nonprofit hospitals are required by the federal government to conduct a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). A statewide collaborative of 11 hospitals/systems covering communities in 39 counties is taking a team approach.

Priscilla Keith, executive director of community benefit for Community Health Network, notes the collaborative began in 2015. Key outcomes from that survey identified diabetes, obesity, asthma and access to care as top issues. In the 2018 efforts, the health systems partnered with the Indiana University School of Public Health to create a common set of survey questions.



Priscilla Keith says partnerships that emerge as a result of the community needs assessment have long-term benefits.

“When we get that data back, we have a foundation,” Keith explains, “as they say, repeatable data. In 2021, when we go forward to the next CHNA, we already have a platform on which to do the next community assessment.”

Among the partnerships that have emerged for Community Health Network: a Healthy South Side initiative with Franciscan Health and a Healthy Hamilton County program that includes St. Vincent, Indiana University Health and Riverview Health.

Keith offers several examples of Community follow-ups from the 2015 analysis. They include nurses in more than 100 Marion County school clinics working with students on asthma education and treatment. Also, a partnership with Meals on Wheels helps alleviate food insecurity issues

for diabetes and cardiovascular patients.

Initiated as part of the Affordable Care Act, the CHNAs “give hospitals a blueprint to knowing what the needs are in their communities,” Keith maintains. Each facility will work with its leadership teams to analyze results, prioritize issues and prepare implementation strategies, which are required to be submitted to the board of directors.

In an industry often known for its competitiveness, the hospital

collaborative was cited by the Catholic Health Hospital Association for its “ability to be innovative and find common ground.” Keith calls it “unique” and the “crown jewel” of the CHNA effort.

The 11 hospitals/systems involved are Community Health Network, Community Healthcare System, Deaconess Health System, Franciscan Health, Gibson General Hospital, Hendricks Regional Health, Indiana University Health, Methodist Hospitals, North Central Health Services, Riverview Health and St. Vincent.

RESOURCE: Priscilla Keith, Community Health Network, at www.mycommunityneeds.org

UIndy Provides Addictions Counselor Education

Addiction today is commonly associated with the state and nation’s opioid epidemic. The challenges, though, are much broader. The University of Indianapolis (UIndy) is responding with a pair of new addictions counseling programs.

“Indiana has one of the higher opioid death rates in the nation, but there is also the understanding that addictions in a broad perspective are very problematic,” attests Anita Thomas, dean of the university’s College of Applied Behavioral Sciences. The World Health Organization definition of addictions includes, among others, alcohol, narcotics, gambling, sexual – and now gaming.

The Master of Arts in Addiction Counseling – which began with the fall 2018 term – will combine psychology, social work and counseling into a behavioral health care curriculum. Thomas adds that students will be able to do additional coursework that is addiction-specific and have access to clinical supervision opportunities.

The Interprofessional Certificate in Addictions, launching in January, is designed as a postgraduate experience for individuals already practicing in the field. It is housed in the College of Applied Behavioral Sciences but co-sponsored by the School of Nursing and includes faculty from physical therapy and occupational therapy, among other fields.

Thomas emphasizes the importance of integrated health care teams in this field. The certificate program will feature team training and simulation experiences, allowing for that development of the team approach.

With many states having expansive licensure requirements for addictions professionals, the dean believes the new programs will prove attractive to students from not only UIndy but beyond. Of

New addictions counseling programs will be housed in the University of Indianapolis Health Pavilion (*University of Indianapolis photo*).



particular concern is the shortage of counselors, with a recent study revealing fewer than 20% of Indiana license applications or renewals come from rural locations.

“We certainly know that individuals who experience depression, anxiety, trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, often don’t have access to treatment, especially in rural areas,” Thomas points out. “There is still a stigma around mental health and seeking treatment. Many individuals will choose a form of self-medication ... as a way to cope with some of their issues.”

The master’s program can be completed in one calendar year, with part-time options (one and a half to two years) also available.

RESOURCE: Anita Thomas, University of Indianapolis, at www.unindy.edu