

**HEALTHCARE DISPARITY IN AN INNER CITY  
NEIGHBORHOOD**

A case study in assessment

**MID-AMERICA REGIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH  
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## Health care disparity in an inner city neighborhood

### **Case Study in Assessment**

During the 1998/1999 school year at George Washington Elementary School located in a predominantly African-American low income community where the majority of residents lived in subsidized public housing, it became apparent to the principal, assistant principal, and a number of teachers that many students had both mental and medical needs that were not being met. School records indicated a high rate of unimmunized students, lack of counseling for drug abuse, and a high rate of teen pregnancies. Realizing that the school by itself did not have the resources or expertise to meet the needs a local pediatrician was consulted. The pediatrician and school representatives agreed that further assessment of the health status of the community was warranted. Due to the scope of the project the local pediatrician contracted an epidemiologist to conduct the assessment. The epidemiologist primary goal at the beginning was to assess the health status of the community and identify unmet needs. As the project progressed it became apparent that the project entailed much more than just an assessment of the health status of a community.

### ASSESSMENT

The epidemiologist began the project by meeting with key staff from the school system and introducing herself and outlining her goal of assessing the health status of the community. During this initial meeting she sought the input and guidance from the school

representatives on their perceived health needs of the community. From this discussion several key stakeholders within the community were identified for future contact. Following the initial meeting with school representatives the epidemiologist contacted each of the following agencies or individuals over the course of the next few weeks:

Church of Good News: Pastor, Lewis Beutina Active in the community for over 17 years.

Inter-Agency Council of Big City, Illinois: Agency brings together various local agencies, including the housing authority, police, and community members and leaders.

Better Boys and Girls Clubs: Provides a safe environment for children and adolescents to grow and play. It is also active in various community prevention and intervention programs.

Mary Tyler Moore Day Care Center: Representatives have been active on community boards and committees.

CADRE: Combating Alcohol Drugs through Rehabilitation and Education is a program housed in a local public housing building. This group is active in the community providing education, training and rehab for community members. CADRE. also provides prevention and intervention for families and individuals and also takes referrals.

Urban Systems of Care (USC): This group works with families and individuals to identify community issues and concerns and make appropriate connections and referrals to mental health services.

Inner City Advisory Council: This group is comprised of members of the community who are interested in the community at large.

From these initial meetings there developed a consensus that certain parameters should be followed in conducting the needs assessment:

The assessment should include open forums and focus groups inviting public comment

A questionnaire that would be useful to other agencies as well should be developed and distributed locally

Linkage agreements with community stakeholders and existing social service agencies should be formalized  
A strategic plan for securing funding to implement identified initiatives should be developed

In order to meet these parameters a representative from each agency and the community at large was asked to form a planning committee facilitated by the epidemiologist. A comprehensive questionnaire was developed and seven, well attended open forums were held. With the information gathered from the open forums and 500 questionnaires returned the following gaps in services were identified:

#### Mental Health Needs

- \_\_\_ School based family counseling
- \_\_\_ Training for teachers on signs and symptoms to watch for depression, neglect, drug use, provided on a routine basis.
- \_\_\_ A in-house mental health counselor accessible to students and teachers
- \_\_\_ Intervention activities for at risk students
- \_\_\_ Linkage agreements with other mental health providers
- \_\_\_ Resources in the form of support groups for parents

#### Medical Needs

- Free school physicals
- School based immunization clinics
- School based lead screens
- A free health education program for parents
- Resource directory and linkage agreements with area primary care providers

This information was formalized in a report put together by the health planning committee and submitted to participating partners and community members. The recommendation of the planning committee was to implement these services. The process would involve a community board that would approve all regulations/operations, working in cooperation with the local school board and principal, as well as the Chicago Public School superintendent. The cost of the project would be funded 50% by the Chicago Public



School System and 50% from local matching funds. This completed the project due to contractual requirements and lack of continued funding for the project.

RECOMMENDATION:

A strong case can be built that the three core functions of Public Health, assessment, policy development, and assurance do not exist effectively one without the other. If we examine the case study presented one can appreciate the strength of the assessment process taken; the engagement of stakeholders within the community, the participation rate, and effectiveness of the questionnaire. However, if we explore the parameter identified from the meetings with area providers "strategic plan developed for funding program initiatives" one realizes that assessment is but one step toward improving the health status of a community. Without sound policy development and an assurance plan in place to ensure that services can be provided it is difficult if not impossible to improve the health status of this community. It should be noted that this case study only covers assessment. Team Sunrise would argue that a combination of all three Public Health functions increases the viability of the project.

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### Teacher's Guide:

1. According to Dr. Rouwitz (page 99), there are three steps in the assessment process:
  - designing a durable integrated public health information system....a true partnership
  - identifying community resources and evaluating their effectiveness
  - utilizing the data that are collected

Did this project effectively meet each of these three steps and why or why not?

2. What fiscal inadequacies present barriers?
3. What personnel inadequacies present barriers?
4. What alternative strategies would you develop to overcome each barrier?
5. What would be the next steps for this project?
6. Who are the most likely leaders for this project and why?