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ENGAGING COMMUNITIES TO IMPROVE HEALTH OUTCOMES: THE ROLE OF SPARTANBURG REGIONAL HEALTHCARE SYSTEM IN THE ROAD TO BETTER HEALTH



Having the “right leader” as a representative of the organization was key, especially an individual with an understanding of public health and great interpersonal skills and personality.”

Phil Feisal, President Spartanburg Regional Medical Center

Data and Community Engagement

The Road to Better Health Spartanburg has proven that working collectively and in partnership with the community is more effective than working in silos when addressing community health challenges. This collaborative, established in 2008, and co-championed by the local hospital, places a strong focus on data, alignment of influence and resources, and partnerships with the community. Together, they have had significant impact on the health and wellbeing of community members.

Motivators for the Road to Better Health

- Spartanburg Health Indicators Project revealed that the county's health indicators performed poorly when compared with its peers.
- Potential for collective impact given the strong relationships formed in time as a result of partnerships within the community.
- Non-profit hospital Strategic Imperative to Improve Community Health.

Results

- 50% reduction in Infant mortality for all races: Comparing 2005-2007 with 2011-2013, infant mortality rate has reduced by 46% (50% reduction for Caucasians and 43% reduction for African Americans). Statewide, the reduction was only 17%.
- 4.4 times more reduction in Low-Birth weight than the state. Comparing 2005-2007 with 2011-2013, Spartanburg has experienced an 8% reduction in Low Birth Weight (7.7% for African Americans, and 7.8% for Caucasians). Statewide, the reduction was only 1.8%.
- 35 million in uncompensated care savings: Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System has saved over 35 million dollars in charity care since 2008.
- National recognition: both the hospital and the community have achieved national recognition for pioneer efforts to improve the health of the population.

Hospital Contribution

- Development of the Community Health Policy and Strategy Department, with a Vice President that reports to the Chief Operating Officer of the System.
- Establishment of a network to provide care navigation for the low income uninsured.
- Hospital leadership champions fundraising and/or implementation of solutions recommended by taskforces.

DATA ASSETS

The Spartanburg Community Indicators Project led by faculty of the University of South Carolina Upstate, has traditionally reported on data and community initiatives via six indicator areas.

- Civic Health
- Economy
- Education
- Natural Environment
- Public Health
- Social Environment

In 2008, this project showed that Spartanburg scored poorly in health outcomes when compared with peer counties.

The information produced by this project became the main source of data for county stakeholders in their process to strategize resource allocation in response to community needs.

Currently, the Road to Better Health and other taskforces of Strategic Spartanburg, use this data for prioritization and monitoring goal achievement.

COMMUNITY ASSETS

The Spartanburg Grassroots Leadership Development Institute funded by the Spartanburg Community Foundation and the City of Spartanburg has trained more than 175 grassroots leaders free of charge since 2004.

It is an intense seven-month leadership training program designed to inspire participants to assume ownership of critical issues in their community and equip them with tools needed to make a difference in Spartanburg. The majority of participants are grassroots individuals who want to catalyze positive social change in their neighborhoods.

The program provides graduates of the institute an opportunity to apply their skills as potential board members of local non-profits.

HOSPITAL ROLE IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ROAD TO BETTER HEALTH

One of the Strategic Imperatives of SRHS is to "Improve Community Health"; but the hospital could not improve the health of the community unless it worked with the community.

Therefore, they established a senior leadership position charged with community health policy and strategy. This vice-president would have the flexibility to work with the community in determining how to best collaborate to accelerate health improvement in the county.

Partnering with the community was not a new thing for the health care system, as its Gibbs Cancer Center had been implementing community engagement strategies for early detection and treatment of cancer in minority populations.

In 2008, the new vice-president met individually with most movers and shakers of the county and used the data and reports produced in the Spartanburg Community Indicators project as a tool to catalyze the creation of a guiding coalition for health improvement in the county called the Road to Better Health (RTBH).

Today, the health system contributes with funds and fundraising to address preventable medical conditions in response to the recommendations of the RTBH taskforces.

The taskforces are open to anyone who wants to participate as independent concerned individuals, or representatives of agencies.

THE TRANSFORMATION CYCLE

1. Collection and analysis of county, community, and underserved population data
2. Champion meets with major stakeholders to share data and motivate them to form a coalition.
3. Partners agree on collective goals.
4. Partners align resources and influence to invest in pilot programs to impact the goals.
5. External funding is attracted in response to the built collaborative capacity.
6. Initial impact on outcomes and return on investment
7. Reinforced engagement of partners.
8. Continued impact on outcomes.

COMMITMENT IMPACTS LIVES

Some of the initiatives established or supported by the RTBH and funded through a combination of private and public resources that have had a positive impact in the health of the county are:

- Nurse Family Partnership, Birth Matters, SBIRT, and Long Acting Reversible Contraception Campaign for teenagers, which collectively contributed to a 50% reduction in Infant Mortality and an 8% reduction in Low-Birth Weight when comparing 2005-2008 with 2011-2013.
- AccessHealth Spartanburg which provides navigation and care coordination services to more than 1500 low-income uninsured in the county. It improved participant health outcomes and achieved 42.42% inpatient and ED cost reduction for this population in 2013.
- Behavioral health taskforce, which among others is addressing the disproportionate burden of behavioral health issues among inmates.
- Northside Spartanburg revitalization project in which neighbors, the hospital and community partners are working together to improve the wellness in this area of town through a combination of economic, environmental, and health interventions

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Renée Romberger, VP of Community Health Policy and Strategy, refers to the Road to Better Health as "a coalition of unlikely but very effective partners". The coalition success can be attributed to several factors:

- Shared belief in collaboration as an effective tool to improve health status (and early wins that proved it accurate)
- Shared governance structure built on trust and that leverages expertise and leadership capacity.
- Mutual accountability: RTBHS member interaction in a variety of different professional and volunteer projects fostered mutual accountability, which in turn fuels partner alignment of time and resources.
- In-kind backbone: The leadership of a core group of individuals and organizations who assumed the functioning of the RTBHS as part of their work duties.
- Measurable early wins: The coalition has started to see results, and community partners take pride in the collaborative capacity and collaboration which is now the social norm.
- Continuous communication with partners, funders, and other stakeholders.