

National Public Health Week Luncheon and Town Hall Meeting Reinventing Health in One of America's Poorest Communities: Camden, NJ

Jeffrey Brenner, MD

Panelists: Kathy Jackson, MSN; Ana Aningalan, MSW; Kelly Craig, MSW; Jessica Cordero

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How best to provide care to the neediest population has proven to be a significant challenge to clinicians, hospital administrators, government officials, health plans, and policy analysts. The Affordable Care Act provides the impetus to make it a priority, but efforts to date have been sporadic and continue to lag far behind. Those working to develop innovative practice models need look no further than Camden, where the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers, under the leadership of Jeffrey Brenner, MD, has made significant strides.

On April 5, 2011, the Jefferson School of Population Health celebrated National Public Health Week with an open Town Hall meeting and luncheon. The standing room only audience learned first-hand what Dr. Brenner and his team of social workers, nurses, and health coaches have accomplished in Camden.

The Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers began as a breakfast meeting where practitioners compared notes on local challenges. Over the last 9 years it has grown into a community organization that joins together the 3 main hospitals – Cooper University Hospital, Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center, and Virtua Health – with physicians, nurses, case workers, and health coaches. The team uses data analysis and word of mouth to identify the most burdensome patients, seeking them out to provide assistance with access to services, scheduling, transportation, and even housing.

Dr. Brenner himself has spent the last 11 years on the front line, providing care and treating the most indigent patients who have a spectrum of complex health and psychosocial problems. He tired of observing the common pattern of patients utilizing the emergency room as a source of primary care, moving through the system like a revolving door. He has dedicated painstaking time, poring over

countless data, to identify Camden's neediest population and develop a coordinated plan to provide them with appropriate primary care.

As we seek to meet the needs of our sickest patients in a cost-effective way, it is important to note the example of Camden. According to Dr. Brenner and his team, caring for this impoverished and disenfranchised population requires understanding: 1) how to locate them, 2) how to motivate them, and 3) how to provide wrap-around services (such as mental health services, housing, and transportation) that have a direct impact on health outcomes.

In these days of health reform there is no single solution to fostering wellness. The dedication and hard work illustrated by Dr. Brenner and his team offer a model of care for problem-solving some of the greatest challenges in public health today. ■