

The Jefferson School of Health Policy and Population Health – Part One

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On July 28, 2008, the Board of Trustees approved the establishment of the *Jefferson School of Health Policy and Population Health (JSHPPH)* as a stand-alone entity within Thomas Jefferson University. This new School will enroll its first students by September 2009 and was the direct outgrowth of a multi-year strategic planning process that identified “health policy and population health” as immediate priorities crucial to Jefferson as a healthcare leader in the 21st century.

The Department of Health Policy, including its current faculty, staff, programs and research, will be organizationally relocated from Jefferson Medical College to form the nucleus of the new School. David B. Nash, MD, MBA, Chair of the Department of Health Policy, will serve as the founding Dean. An Advisory Committee, composed of key members of the Jefferson community and chaired by Richard C. Wender, MD, Alumni Professor and Chair of the Department of Family and Community Medicine of Jefferson Medical College, will serve as the primary consultative resource for the new School.

The mission of the Jefferson School of Health Policy and Population Health is to prepare leaders with global vision to develop, implement and evaluate health policies and systems that improve the health of populations and thereby enhance the quality of life. The School will fulfill its mission through provision of exemplary graduate academic programming, continuing education courses and conferences, and sustained research and consulting in the areas of health policy, population health, and healthcare quality and safety.

The Master’s in Public Health (MPH) degree and certificate programs, presently offered through Jefferson College of Graduate Studies, will move to the new School. Over the next few years, JSHPPH will offer certificate and master’s degree programs in health policy, healthcare quality and safety, and chronic care management. It will also provide doctoral degree programs (PhD and DrHP) in population health and health policy. Because of their innovative and pioneering content, it is anticipated that the programs in chronic care management, healthcare quality and safety, and population health will help to define the future of education and research in these vital areas.

Why a School of Health Policy and Population Health? Why now?

The answer is simple: the nation's healthcare system is in crisis.

- Chronic illness is epidemic and unmanaged, accounting for nearly 80% of all healthcare spending and affecting 133 million Americans (45% of the population).
- Health insurance premiums have risen almost 90% since 2000.
- 47 million Americans are currently uninsured and 16 million are underinsured.
- Poor and minority populations have limited or no access to healthcare of any kind.
- The aging of the U.S. population is increasing demands on all sectors of the healthcare system.
- The Institute of Medicine estimates that almost 100,000 patients die annually in US hospitals due to medical errors.
- The failure to incorporate the latest in evidence-based practice leads to misdiagnosis or inappropriate care.
- Threats of national disasters (Katrina) and global epidemics (Avian flu, MRSA) are everpresent and can easily overwhelm local or national healthcare resources.

Unfortunately, increased expenditure on health care has not led to increased quality, safety, affordability or accessibility. While the United States spends more per capita annually for health care (a total of \$2 trillion) than any other industrialized country, it ranks at the bottom for even the most fundamental quality indicators such as infant mortality and life expectancy.

The need to address the healthcare crisis in the United States – its quality, safety, affordability and accessibility, is *incontrovertible*. It is no longer possible to prepare high-quality healthcare providers and educators without addressing these issues holistically from the perspective of population health and with the tools of health policy analysis.

As a discipline, population health is broadly defined as health *outcomes* (e.g., mortality, morbidity, quality of life) and their *distribution* within a population; the health *determinants* (e.g., medical care, socioeconomic status, genetics, public health) that influence this distribution; and the *policies and interventions*, both social and individual, that impact these determinants. By definition, population health is holistic. It views the world as a system and looks for patterns and connections within this system. It analyzes problems – such as healthcare quality and safety or chronic disease – in context and looks to the patterns and pervading variables to develop the best solutions.

Why a School of Health Policy and Population Health at Jefferson?

There are four compelling reasons:

First, it helps Jefferson to fulfill its mission of education, research, clinical excellence, and community service. The size and complexity of the healthcare system have created a need for continued research and a demand for the preparation of health services professionals and practitioners who are trained in these areas at the graduate level.

Second, it provides a means for Jefferson to achieve its vision, which is to maintain and enhance its position as a leading academic health center within the national arena and to expand its influence and contributions to the global community.

Third, the resources and capabilities necessary to build a premier center in health policy and population health are already present within the Jefferson community.

The Department of Health Policy has a national reputation for expertise in health policy, especially in areas of healthcare quality/safety and chronic care management. For the past decade, the Department has demonstrated sustained ability, via major grant funding, to conduct research and continuing education programming in these and other policy areas. The University has further demonstrated commitment to population health through its establishment of an accredited master's degree program in public health (MPH). Additional expertise is found in the Department of Family and Community Medicine; the Kimmel Cancer Center, especially its Division of Population Science in the Department of Medical Oncology; the Center for Applied Research on Aging and Health (CARAH) of Jefferson College of Health Professions; and in key leadership areas of Jefferson Hospital and Jefferson University Physicians (JUP).

The establishment of the School of Health Policy and Population Health will recognize and build on existing Jefferson strengths and provide a venue for these strengths that is visible nationally and internationally. It will serve as a platform to expand opportunities for related research and grants within the School, collaboratively across the University, and through new national and international partnerships.

Finally, establishing a School of Health Policy and Population Health is in keeping with Jefferson's historic tradition of clinical excellence and service to the community. Over time, however, the definition of community has changed – from city to region – from region to nation – and now, the world. Assuring the health and wellness of all populations, in all places, and providing quality and compassionate healthcare to all who need it will remain a defining theme of the 21st century. It is no longer possible for Jefferson to achieve clinical excellence, to educate medical and health professionals, and to serve the community without making health policy and population health a central focus of these efforts.

In 2024, Jefferson will celebrate its bicentennial. To achieve such a milestone is rare for any institution. Jefferson is fortunate in that it can reach into a rich and illustrious past as it builds for the future. Two hundred years of wisdom and experience have produced continued success, valued reputation and strategic vision. The establishment of the School of Health Policy and Population Health will enable Jefferson to maintain and enhance its position as a leading academic health center and to expand its influence and contributions to the global community.

The Health Policy Newsletter will include periodic updates on JSHPH as we move toward its September 2009 opening. You may follow our progress online at the JSHPH website www.jefferson.edu/JSHPH and blog <http://departmentofhealthpolicy.blogspot.com/>

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