

Population Health Forums

Formerly Health Policy Forums

Population Health: Integrating Medicine and Public Health

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Dr. Gourevitch is Professor and founding Chair of the Department of Population Health at the NYU School of Medicine. Dr. Gourevitch leads initiatives to improve population health through interventions in health care delivery, bridging multiple departments and several of NYU's schools. He is also co-Director of the Community Engagement and Population Health Research Core of the Clinical and Translational Science Institute that bridges NYU with New York City's municipal hospital system, the Health and Hospitals Corporation.

On the heels of Hurricane Sandy, Dr. Gourevitch opened this Forum by sharing a glimpse of the current situation and how medical facilities, including NYU, were impacted by the storm. He described the massive organizational challenge involved in transferring patients, and reassigning medical personnel and students. It was certainly impressive that this occurred safely and seamlessly.

The term "population health" is often used interchangeably with "public health" yet nuances exist within these terms and Gourevitch helped the audience to understand the differences

and similarities. He first gave a historical overview of the relationship between medicine and public health. For example, after initial alignment in the early 1900s, the fields diverged by the middle of the century as separate educational paths evolved. In recent years there has been a movement toward greater alignment.

Gourevitch defines public health as what we do as a society to assure conditions in which people can be healthy. Traditionally this included a set of functions advanced by health departments and governmental agencies. He describes population health as the science of understanding and optimizing the health of populations of persons. In the population health framework, determinants of health include medical care and health systems.

To further hone in on the theme of population health, Gourevitch analyzed how population health is viewed by academic medical centers (AMCs) and their associated healthcare delivery systems. The focus of AMCs' clinical systems is increasingly aligned with the Triple Aim (improving care, improving health of populations, and reducing costs). To fully understand population

health, determinants of health beyond health care delivery, and a focus on all patients in a geographic area, need to be considered, Gourevitch explained.

The separation between population health strategies and clinical strategies can be bridged by many fields and areas of expertise including: community health; health economics; health policy; comparative effectiveness; behavior change; biostatistics; epidemiology; health disparities; and health delivery science. Gourevitch identified ways in which AMCs house these themes in the current academic landscape.

Gourevitch summarized this Forum presentation by outlining some of the major challenges and opportunities. Incentivizing investments that bridge the divide between clinical and population-oriented strategies will continue to be a significant challenge. Additionally, the economic case for investments in population health must be strengthened. The ACA focus on system accountability creates opportunities for health. AMCs are becoming more in sync with a population health focus. Gourevitch emphasized that tremendous possibilities exist that will help to align clinical delivery systems with public health goals. ■