

Health in All Policies: Understanding Public Health at the State Level

On March 31st, 2016, the Public Health Policy and Advocacy class had the opportunity to visit the [Pennsylvania Department of Health](#) and meet caucus members at the state capitol in Harrisburg, PA. This enlightening trip allowed us to apply what we learned about policy in the classroom to a real venue.

At the Department of Health, [Dr. Karen Murphy](#), the Secretary of Health for the PA Department of Health, welcomed us and discussed health issues that had been prioritized for legislative change. Dr. Murphy explained how the opioid abuse epidemic was a huge concern for our state. She emphasized that 7 people die per day from prescription drug use. Dr. Murphy discussed possible expansions of the [2014 Act 139](#) where first responders were allowed to carry and administer a lifesaving prescription drug called Naloxone to overdose patients while providing immunity from prosecution to those who initially reported the overdose to authorities. Ideas for expansion included making Naloxone more readily available to the public, which ideally would decrease deaths due to opioid overdose.

Dr. Murphy encouraged students to ask questions and addressed various subtopics such as the implementation, feasibility and enforcement of these ideas. It was exciting to apply our classroom knowledge of critically thinking and developing solutions to complex public health issues into a real and powerful venue. Policy creation and adoption are powerful tools used to effect change. This exposure to the cross between public health and law was an invaluable experience.

The rest of the presenters followed the same format. The presenters were



Below photo. Back row left to right: Alyssa Sipes, Nate Ford, Spencer Mitchell, Junaid Yasin, Tomas Aguilar, Director, Bureau of Health Promotion Risk Reduction, Adam Carroll, Jeffrey Backer, Director, Division of Planning and Operations, Bureau of Public Health Preparedness; Randy Aviado, Vincent Basile, Joshua Clark; Tom Nowland, Kevin Clark, and Charlotte Cosgrove. Front row left to right: Dr. Sharon Watkins, Director, Bureau of Epidemiology; Robin Rothermel, Director, Bureau of Communicable Diseases; Nour Cheikhali; Ashley Asencio; Katie Jarrell; Natasha Bagwe; Connie Choi; Kerona Sharpe; Dr. Loren Robinson, Deputy Secretary for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention; Christina Downing, Brianna Williams, and Martha Romney.

as follows: Robin Rothermel, Director, Bureau of Communicable Diseases; Dr. Glenda Cardillo, Public Health Physician, Bureau of Community Health Systems; Dr. Sharon Watkins, Director of the Bureau of Epidemiology, Jeffery Backer, Division Director, Bureau of Public Health Preparedness; Tomas Aguilar, Director, Bureau of Health Promotion and Risk Reduction, then finally Dr. Loren Robinson, Deputy Secretary for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. Dr. Loren Robinson was energetic and insightful and ended our trip to the Department of Health on a high note. Many appreciated the story of her journey expanding her desire to heal as a physician to effecting impactful improvement in health for the masses. Dr. Robinson then took the time to encourage our group to

continue on our public health path and was a refreshing cap to the Department of Health portion of the trip.

The second portion of the trip included a meeting with Whitney Krosse, the Executive Director for the House Health Committee (R) Caucus, and with Clarissa Freeman, Executive Director of the Public Health and Welfare Committee in the Senate Minority Caucus. These two individuals did a wonderful job of expressing the importance of continuing to learn how to translate health science into meaningful policy. They emphasized how much a group like ours is part of a health community that helps to inform and supplement their understanding of pertinent health issues that her law degree doesn't fully cover. It emphasized how

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critical it is for knowledgeable individuals from different fields such as health, law and economics to share information between disciplines.

Overall, this trip was an eye opener to the expansiveness of public health and how it reaches a variety of fields to collectively improve the health of the public. We are thankful to all those who met with us and to Professors Martha Romney and Dr. Robert Simmons for providing such an

impactful learning experience. And to learn the meaning of "health" in all policies.

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