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Providing Community-Based Health Care to the Homeless

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Providing Community-Based Health Care to the Homeless

The Center for Collaborative Research and the Departments of Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Nursing and Dental Hygiene faculty members in the College of Allied Health Sciences are conducting a project to train nursing and allied health students to provide interdisciplinary, community-based health care to individuals who are homeless in the shelter system of Philadelphia. This project grew from the volunteer and organizational efforts of Diane Levy, and the work of Laura Gitlin, Kevin Lyons and members of the project team in developing the 5-stage model of collaboration and in working with older adults who are underserved (1). Funded by the Bureau of Health Professions this project brings together health care providers, community leaders, and members of the homeless community to form a unique community-based partnership.

Members of the project team are: Kevin Lyons, PhD and Laura Gitlin, PhD, Center for Collaborative Research; Diane Levy, MS and Julie Mount, PhD, Department of Physical Therapy; Mary Corcoran, PhD and Susan Connor, Department of Occupational Therapy; Betty Forbes, EdD, Department of Nursing; and Jaclyn Gleber, MS and Ann Marie Tedesco, MS who are Dental Hygiene faculty members. During the first year of the project, this team participated with representatives of four homeless shelters in a series of meetings designed to build a collaborative team, identify pressing health care needs of individuals who are homeless and appropriate ways of working with this population. As a result of these meetings, the academic departments modified discipline-specific courses in their program and adjusted their multidisciplinary courses in health policy and ethics to reflect issues related to community-based health care and homelessness. The team also developed two interdisciplinary courses that contain didactic and clinical experiences. Didactic classes help students form interdisciplinary teams and understand the specific needs of the homeless. In the clinical component, students apply what is learned in their didactic course work to real problems faced by individuals who are homeless and then bring this learning back to the classroom to modify their formal understanding of the issues.

The project is designed to take students who are independent practitioners with a unidisciplinary focus and enable them to become members of an interdisciplinary, community-based team. Another outcome of the project is to prepare students to function in a new service delivery system. This delivery system will be based on principles of interdisciplinary team care, is consumer driven, represents an integration of expertise from community leaders and health care practitioners, and emphasizes health promotion and restoration strategies.

References

1. Gitlin LN, Lyons KJ, Kolodner, E. (1994). A model to build collaborative research or educational teams of health professionals in gerontology. *Educational Gerontology*. 20(1), 15-34.

Diane Cornman Levy, Kevin J. Lyons and Laura N. Gitlin: Providing Community-Based Health Care to the Homeless

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