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Community Health Assessments: Successful Strategies in Working with Collaborating Competitors

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The passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) in May of 2010 included new requirements for health systems that dovetailed with new requirements for Health Departments seeking National Public Health accreditation. One of these requirements was conducting a community health assessment. This created a perfect opportunity for Hospitals to engage in a partnership with Local Public Health Departments.

The Kent County Health Department (KCHD) and Value Health Partners (VHP), an incorporated, strategic alliance among eight Michigan health systems covering 61 Michigan counties, 27 Hospitals and over 230 facilities, decided to pilot a community health assessment project in Kent County that could then be replicated throughout the VHP system. This would eliminate a hodgepodge of different processes and data elements and compare them in an apples to apples fashion. The Health Department would serve Mary's Hospital, Metropolitan Hospital, Mary Free Bed and Pine Rest. The Health Department's challenge was to:

- Facilitate without taking charge
- Connect the dots for participants
- Balance both content and process
- Build individual and group capacity

The five Hospital systems struggled through their different agendas and institutional concerns that came into play at various times throughout the process, but always concluded that the value of the collaborative process transcended all the other concerns and was the most value-added part of the process.