2012


Lehigh Valley Health Network

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A PASSION FOR BETTER MEDICINE

Creating a healthier community

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY HEALTH AND HEALTH STUDIES

2012 ANNUAL REPORT

Lehigh Valley Health Network
Jeff Etchason, MD  
Department Chair and Senior Vice President for Health Systems Research and Innovation  
Interim Director, Health Services Research
Those of us in this department are very fortunate to be able to pursue our passion to serve those in our community with the greatest need. That service is made possible through the generous support of Lehigh Valley Health Network and the Dorothy Rider Pool Health Care Trust.

Deborah Swavely, DNP, RN  
Administrator
It is satisfying to lead research and evaluation that will help guide Lehigh Valley Health Network in transforming health care delivery that ultimately improves the health status and quality of life for our community members.

Jessica Adams-Skinner, EdD, MPH  
Director, Community Health
The health of a community does not rest solely with the health care system but with all systems working synergistically to benefit everyone. Moreover, each individual must understand his/her role in relation to these systems to increase the chances of achieving better health outcomes for self, and by default, the community.

Dorothy Faulkner, PhD, MPH, PMP  
Director, Population Health Research
I live to measure phenomena; particularly population health, the health outcomes of groups of individuals and the determinants of those outcomes. I’m also interested in the activities of the medical care system, in collaboration with communities, to influence health more broadly.
The Department of Community Health and Health Studies provides leadership and collaborative support to Lehigh Valley Health Network in seeking to improve the effectiveness of a health services delivery in order to improve access to care, patient outcomes and the health status of our community. The department is organized around three sections: Community Health, Health Services Research and Population Health Research.

The Community Health section develops community and place-based programs driven by needs assessments and/or “best practice” to mitigate health disparities and improve the health status of residents in the Lehigh Valley. The core competencies of Community Health include program design, development, implementation and evaluation.

The Health Services Research section is based on a multidisciplinary approach to scientific investigations that study how social factors, health care systems, organizational structures and processes, health technologies, and personal behaviors affect access to health care, the quality and cost of health care, and quantity and quality of life.

Studies in Health Services Research examine outcomes at the individual, family, organizational, institutional, community, and population level. These studies are concerned with how people get access to health care, how much care costs, and what happens to patients as a result of this care.

The Population Health Research section has its roots in a number of academic disciplines, such as social sciences, epidemiology, biostatistics, informatics and geographic information systems.

Population Health Research uses multiple data sources (census data, mortality statistics, disease registries and health status surveys) to link medical and non-medical factors to health outcomes in population groups. Current research and evaluation activities are focused on linking health outcomes to social factors, such as social support, insurance status and geography.
Impact of the Department of Community Health and Health Studies

- Community Health Needs Assessment
  Collaboration with several other hospitals across three counties

- School-Based Dental Sealant
  8,128 elementary school students were screened, and 4,156 students were treated in Allentown and Easton

- Communities Supporting Children with Asthma
  49 families dealing with pediatric asthma in Allentown were supported or educated

- Community Exchange
  With 649 members, we exchanged more than 10,000 hours of service in 2012

- Pregnant and Parenting Teens
  Provided a forum to support teen mothers from the Allentown School District

- Allentown Promise Neighborhood
  Provided data and evaluation to support positive change at a neighborhood level

- Patients’ Perspective on the Value of Community
  Measured the value of palliative medicine practice for 1,700 patients a year

- Hospital Navigation Study
  Provided recommendations to improve accessibility and navigation of the hospital

- One-on-One Diabetes Education
  Provided diabetes and nutrition education in English and Spanish

- Patient-Centered Medical Homes (PCMH)
  Lead evaluation of the health network’s PCMH initiative, as well as the community care team project
CREATING A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY
ONE ISSUE
AT A TIME

Map of regions including Carbon, Northampton, Lehigh, Bucks, and Montgomery.
Community Health Needs Assessment

Our department is dedicated to improving the health of the Lehigh Valley. To achieve this, it is important to better understand the health needs of the members of the community.

A Community Health Needs Assessment is one important way to understand these needs. It provides a broad picture of health in a region by spanning not only illnesses, but also other factors affecting health such as the environment, economics and lifestyle.

This type of health assessment is crucial in planning for health-related services and actions, and is now a requirement for not-for-profit health care systems as part of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

The Health Care Council of the Lehigh Valley (HCCLV) was formed in 2011 as a collaborative effort among all the local not-for-profit health care systems to conduct an ongoing community health needs assessment.

Leaders from our department represent LVHN on the HCCLV and are working with the other members in conducting a Community Health Needs Assessment for the region.

The HCCLV completed a Community Health Profile, the first step in a Community Health Needs Assessment. The profile compiles a number of health indicators and risk factors that were collected from several sources including data from U.S. Census, Centers for Disease Control, and from surveys of local community members.

The profile has been shared with the community during several public forums. Along with community input, the profile will then be used to drive community engagement strategies to improve health in the region.
Healthy You and Child Too!

Health literacy is the ability for individuals to understand and use health care information to make decisions and follow instructions.

Studies show that literacy plays a role in health and health care choices. Only one in ten adults has the basic reading skills needed to stay healthy and prevent disease. A lack of these skills (known as low literacy) can lead to more hospital stays and less use of regular preventive care. This can lead to higher health care costs for patients and communities (2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy and the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education).

To help address the issue of low health literacy in the Lehigh Valley, our department collaborated with The Literacy Center to form the Healthy You and Child Too! educational series. Over 12 weeks, parents and caregivers of children ages 3 to 12 learned to better manage their own health, the health of their children, and how to communicate better with health care providers.

“...the class lessons had trained them in basic first aid, and they were ready to go!”

— Alice Kim, instructor, The Literacy Center
Last year, our department led the evaluation of the Diabetes Education Program offered by LVHN’s Community Health and Wellness Center. This program was designed to address the needs of patients with low health literacy which has been linked to higher use of services, frequent hospital stays and poor health outcomes.

Results from the evaluation showed significant improvements in participants’ knowledge of diabetes care. It also showed improved confidence in their ability to carry out diabetes self-care plans. The results of this study are being published in the Journal for Healthcare Quality.
Health literacy is important because learning can prevent many illnesses in time. The Diabetes Health Literacy Program is like a gift from God, and if people learn about the wonderful office staff, they would come because there is support. God bless the staff.

— Margarita Rivas of Allentown
One-on-One Diabetes Education at Vida Nueva Health Center

Two registered nurses from our department offer diabetes education sessions on nutrition and medications once a week to patients of Vida Nueva at Casa Guadalupe, located in Allentown. The sessions are offered in English and/or Spanish.

After receiving this education, patients become more active in self-care. Nurses help patients set realistic health goals and access the basic tools to manage their disease.

This program helps free up other clinicians’ time in order to serve even more patients. Doctors can refer patients to the education sessions for extra help. If a patient does not need a full check-up with the doctor, the nurses can answer the patients’ questions about diabetes, refill their medicines and make sure they are caught up with blood tests. Patients appreciate the one-on-one attention and extra time the nurses can spend with them.
A typical story I hear from my patients is that they did not understand how to take their insulin. So we would spend a lot of time with those patients week after week, adjusting their insulin, and finally they feel like they are getting somewhere.

— Hannah Paxton, MPH, RN, systems scientist and health care provider
Oral health is a major problem for children in the Lehigh Valley. Poor oral health has been shown to adversely impact both the physical and academic development of children.

Over the past five years, 8,128 elementary school students in the Allentown and Easton school districts were screened for tooth decay, and 4,156 sealants were placed.

The department has undertaken a research study to determine whether placing dental sealants is associated with fewer missed school days and improvements in standardized test scores.

“After working with the Dental Sealant initiative, I realized that for many of these school-aged children, we are the first contact they’ve had with the dental community. I’m so glad that we not only made a positive memory in their minds, but have helped them receive a preventive treatment that may have an impact on their oral health well into their adult life.”

— Tammy Gildner, dental hygienist
Communities Supporting Children With Asthma

Allentown ranks 10th in the United States as one of the most challenging places to live with asthma (2012 Asthma Capitals Report). Communities Supporting Children with Asthma is a collaboration between LVHN’s department of pediatrics and our department.

Through this partnership, a community health worker and a patient navigator help parents and caregivers gain better access to care, as well as the knowledge to better manage their children's asthma.

In 2012, the project provided pediatric asthma education to 62 families and conducted 55 home assessments.

This map shows that most patients ages 5 to 11 and diagnosed with asthma who visit LVHN’s Children’s Clinic at Lehigh Valley Hospital-17th Street, are heavily clustered in several Allentown elementary schools – Union Terrace, Jefferson, Central, Sheridan and Washington.
CREATING A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY ONE BREATH AT A TIME
In addition to health literacy, patient and consumer activation also are core elements in improving health outcomes. Community Exchange Time Banking refers to a pattern of reciprocal service exchange which uses units of time as currency and is an example of an alternate economic system.

Community Exchange empowers community members to help each other with challenges that affect health. Some examples of the services are transportation to doctor appointments, medical interpretation, as well as giving their friendship to ill patients trying to stay comfortable at home.

The project’s philosophy moves a community beyond simple volunteerism as a way of “helping others” and beyond the traditional concept of charity as a form of receiving help. Members from our community and LVHN earn services of their choosing from other community members, community-based organizations, or LVHN through the investment of their time and talent in servicing others.

Currently, there are 649 members exchanging nearly 10,000 hours of service yearly.


“Community Exchange has become my family. It might not be my family of birth, but it’s my family of choice. I really don’t know what I would have done without them.”

— Wendy Williams of Neffs
CREATING A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY
ONE HOUR AT A TIME
Community Exchange
Wheel Time

At LVHN, the most common reason for missed medical appointments is lack of transportation. Wheel Time connects people needing rides to medical care with caring community drivers. In addition to transportation, relationships develop, and riders add a friend to their support network.

Wheel Time community drivers transported patients to medical appointments at LVHN’s Cancer Center and many other health network practices.
I have met very nice people transporting for Wheel Time. I’ve heard their stories and learned new things about the community. The best part for me, however, is the concept of people helping each other. It makes our community and world stronger.

— Pat Luftman of Emmaus
Imagine a Lehigh Valley where community members work in collaboration with health care providers to heal, comfort and care. Neighbor-to-Neighbor Care Teams are networks of community members supporting health care workers and patients within the communities they live, work, and play.

Food shopping, help at home, prescription pickups and companionship are examples of support in which patients need to remain healthy at home. The Neighbor-to-Neighbor model was built and tested with LVHN’s Optimizing Advanced Complex Illness Support (OACIS) services team.

In 2012, Community Exchange made significant progress in growing the Neighbor-to-Neighbor model with other LVHN medical practices. In June, Neighborhood Health Centers of the Lehigh Valley, the Parish Nurse Coalition, Congregations United for Neighborhood Action, and Community Exchange were funded by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid to coordinate and provide focused care and services that will reduce health care costs and improve health outcomes.

OACIS was visited by the Center to Advance Palliative Care, a leading resource for palliative care program development and growth, where its evaluators gave high scores to the OACIS/Community Exchange partnership. The collaboration will be profiled by the Center to Advance Palliative Care.

Our department’s Population Health Research section is developing a survey which will measure the value of these collaborative efforts from the patients’ perspectives. Patients’ health care was examined before enrolling in OACIS and after patients started receiving services. Findings show OACIS helped to reduce hospital readmissions within 30 days of discharge. To share this knowledge with other palliative care providers, an article entitled “Hospital Outcomes for a Home-Based Palliative Medicine Consulting Service” was written, and will be published in the Journal of Palliative Medicine.
"What you all are doing is paradigm shifting. I will want to follow your journey and learn more. But congratulations on how far it has come and the recognition it is gaining."

— Edgar Cahn, founder, TimeBanks USA
Community Exchange
Las Palabras (The Words)

Precise language interpretation is important to high-quality health care for the many residents of the Lehigh Valley whose preferred language is not English. In the City of Allentown, Hispanic or Latino community members compose 42.8% of residents according to the 2010 U.S. Census.

Through the Las Palabras collaboration, committed, caring, bilingual (mostly English/Spanish community) volunteers have been trained as medical interpreters at no cost to the individual.

Two important aspects of Las Palabras is that community members train with LVHN employees and use a coproduction model where community members receive professional training and give back through service.

As of June 2009, 49 committed, caring, mostly low-income community members have been trained as medical interpreters. These interpreters have reported 2,522 hours of service to patients and providers. This represents a value of more than $150,000 to our community, given that the use of phone interpreter services costs $60 per hour.

“I have been able to help many people, among them people in critical conditions that have felt that listening to a doctor in their own language has been a blessing.”

— Community Exchange member and medical interpreter
Pregnant and Parenting Teens

Our department has been working collaboratively with members of the Allentown community on a number of initiatives to address issues faced by pregnant and parenting adolescents in the Lehigh Valley. The initiative seeks to identify the unique needs of adolescent mothers to increase the resources available to them, and create links to the health care system in order to create a “medical home” for these young mothers and their children.

Working with the William Allen High School of the Allentown School District, the Pregnant and Parenting Teens health team provides a forum of support and is open to discussing and answering questions about topics of interest to these young mothers. This includes anything from conflict resolution and relationship negotiation to identifying gaps in the health care of teens and their children and linking them to the appropriate care sources.

Community partners assisting these efforts include the Allentown School District, The Caring Place/Vida Nueva at Casa Guadalupe, the Allentown Promise Neighborhood, as well as LVHN’s departments of pediatrics and obstetrics/gynecology.

“...there is no greater fulfillment than being able to be part of a young person’s growth and development and knowing that you have contributed in some way to their success. In helping them to realize their potential, we embrace and celebrate their achievements.”

— Valerie Lewis, MD, LVHN adolescent medicine physician and researcher
CREATING A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY ONE GENERATION AT A TIME
Allentown Promise Neighborhood

Promise Neighborhoods of the Lehigh Valley is part of the United Way of Greater Lehigh Valley. Promise Neighborhoods is based on a national model that focuses efforts and resources on the long-term success of children, families and neighborhoods within a framework that covers the lifespan from birth through college and into a career.

This model is the outgrowth of research and practice by the Harlem Children’s Zone in New York, PolicyLink in Oakland, Calif., and the Center for the Study of Social Policy, which has offices in both New York and Washington D.C.

The first effort in the Lehigh Valley is a nine-block area of Old Allentown. There are plans to support the establishment of a second Promise Neighborhood on Bethlehem’s South Side in 2013.

Our department is committed to supporting the Promise Neighborhoods by serving on the leadership team and the data and measurement committee.
‘What’s Up With That?’
Media Awareness Workshop

“What’s Up With That?” is a media awareness and skill-building workshop about photography and journalism for middle school students in the Allentown School District. A workshop took place in the summer of 2012 and was a joint effort of the Resurrected Community Development Corporation, Community Health and Health Studies, and the Dorothy Rider Pool Health Care Trust. The Resurrected Community Development Corporation hosted a workshop at the Allentown Promise Neighborhood office at Ninth and Turner streets.

Ten students signed up for the seven-week workshop and explored topics on media images and language, self-definition, democracy, freedom of expression, censorship, advertising, consumerism and the social impact of media. Students displayed their photographs to 700 community members during a “Back to School” party and other events hosted by the Resurrected Life Community Church during the fall of 2012.

Our department will use the photos taken by workshop participants to help create projects that will address some community issues presented, such as poor nutrition and obesity in certain Allentown neighborhoods. The goal of this collaborative effort is to facilitate access to nutritious food and to help educate community members to make healthier food choices.
I learned that when I have my camera in my hands, it opens up a whole new world for me.

— Workshop participant
Community Issues Management

Community Issues Management is a platform that provides tools to create meaningful maps and reports. This information helps organizations frame discussions, ask better questions, and gain insight to improve community decision making. Community Issues Management contains hundreds of national and local datasets that can tell a more meaningful story about any geographic area.

The Lehigh Valley Community Issues Management contains information on more than 1,000 local community resources. Using it, staff and patients can quickly get information on where to find the closest food bank, gym, transportation services and nutrition services, along with phone numbers, addresses and websites.

This has been used by LVHN’s department of medicine, community care teams, Community Exchange, and Allentown Promise Neighborhood for planning purposes, data analysis support, decision making, collaborative actions and grant writing.

Below is a sample chart created by Community Issues Management:
Use hundreds of national and regional datasets to find areas of poverty, ethnic diversity or foreclosures
Hospital Navigation Study

The visitor and patient experience starts when entering any one of LVHN’s hospitals. However, finding your way can be challenging, especially when you are worried about a loved one or your own health. Getting lost leads to missed and late appointments, which results in decreased patient satisfaction and stress for visitors.

Wayfinding is the use of signage and visual cues to find your way in unfamiliar settings. The wayfinding experience starts when entering the hospital through the main lobby, and then trying to decide in which direction one should go.

Through interviews, observations and other methods, our department staff assessed wayfinding friendliness upon entering Lehigh Valley Hospital–17th Street. Results from this evaluation were shared with hospital decision-makers on how to improve signage and reception for visitors and patients.
Health insurance has been a hot topic for many years and even more so with the advent of health care reform. Working with the division of trauma in the department of surgery, our department colleagues studied LVHN trauma patients with and without health insurance. One question we asked was if someone without health insurance was more likely to die in the hospital from their trauma.

Our staff also wanted to learn, in addition to being uninsured, whether there were social factors that influenced the patient’s outcome following a traumatic injury. We looked at where our trauma patients lived and combined that information with U.S. Census data (poverty, ethnicity, race, education, and literacy) to give a better picture of social factors that might influence the outcomes of trauma patients.

The results suggest that insurance status is the most important predictor of mortality. While other studies have looked at insurance status, this study is the first to directly study this issue by comparing the four main groups of insurance status (uninsured, Medicaid, Medicare, private insurance) against each other. Our results support the need for universal insurance coverage.

**Trauma Cases per BLOCK GROUP**

- **1 - 5**
- **6 - 15**
- **16 - 38**
- **39 - 70**
- **No Data**
- **County Boundary**

This map shows trauma cases treated at LVHN between 2000-2009, per Census Block Group. Trauma cases were geocoded (mapped) and aggregated for each Census Block Group.
Researchers from our department conducted a study in cancer patients receiving LVHN home health services. The purpose of the research was to learn about home care patients’ experiences with pain and how these were affecting their quality of life.

One of the goals of the study was to improve the ways in which doctors and nurses work to relieve pain that cancer patients often experience. Fifty patients were enrolled, and it was found that often they have constant pain, which negatively affects their quality of life.

This is the first time patients’ pain management and quality-of-life have been studied in the home care setting. This study was possible due to the close collaboration between the investigators and the home care oncology team.

Thanks to this collaboration with home health services, it is easier to identify the needs of patients dealing with pain. Future research will survey hospital nurses to see how they help their patients manage pain.

Information from this survey will be used to provide education to nurses and patients to improve pain management.
Patient-Centered Medical Homes

Over the past few years, LVHN has been changing primary care practices to become Patient-Centered Medical Homes (PCMH). A PCMH is where health professionals work as a team to manage a patient’s care and prevent potential problems. Complex diseases such as diabetes or congestive heart failure are addressed more effectively because they require close monitoring and coordination.

PCMHs provide better and more accessible health care through easy access to appointments and better communication between the patients and their health care team, while offering more services in the office and following up on patients who have been in the hospital.

In 2012, a community care team was added to the PCMH model. The team, made up of nurses, behavioral health specialists and social workers, is dedicated to helping patients coordinate their care, manage illness, and learn how to improve their health. Our department is part of the core team that is responsible for implementing this new model, and we are working closely on this project.

Our department is leading the evaluation of the community care team project by looking at the team’s effect on how many patients are admitted to the hospital and/or visit the emergency room. The team makes sure diabetes patients are getting the required tests and taking recommended medications.

Academic Service Collaboration

The Academic Service Collaboration is a partnership created by our department, DeSales University, and Cedar Crest College and funded by the Dorothy Rider Pool Health Care Trust and the Farr Fund. The goal of this collaboration is to enhance solutions to complex issues, and to develop nursing practices by creating new knowledge through research.

Faculty from DeSales and Cedar Crest’s nursing programs work with researchers from our department, and along with leaders in patient care services, identify the top issues in nursing practice and develop proposals to study causes and solutions.

Through this partnership, our department supports exposure to a process where nurses suggest pertinent clinical questions for research and then translate the results into improved patient care.

Many nurses at LVHN are pursuing advanced degrees. The partnership supports the alignment of the needs of the service partners with the academic requirements or practicum experiences required for graduate school.

The Academic Services Collaboration validates our department’s commitment to the profession of nursing by supporting the generation of new knowledge and innovation. These activities also support ongoing Magnet™ designation for nursing services at LVHN. The collaboration expands external funding opportunities for research.

This partnership is modeled after other successful collaborations, but it is the first in the Lehigh Valley. The goal is to develop a sustained long-term partnership between LVHN and local academic institutions providing support to nurses and nursing students so that they may advance their practice and improve the health of our community.
CREATING A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY  ONE COLLABORATION  AT A TIME