

UMass Medical School responds to call from City of Worcester

Collaboration with community health partners supports public health task force



In May 2009, the Worcester Division of Public Health (DPH) experienced dramatic budget cuts resulting from one of the worst economic climates in decades. Recognizing this fiscal crisis as an opportunity to revitalize the city's public health services, City Manager Michael V. O'Brien turned to UMass Medical School, and other community health partners and stakeholders, for help.

As part of the Worcester Public Health Task Force, UMMS, along with its clinical partner, UMass Memorial Health Care, and other local health care organizations, was charged with developing a focused mission for the DPH based on national best practices and reflective of a sustainable financial model. Coordinating and supporting the efforts of the task force were employees from Commonwealth Medicine's Office of Program Development and Enterprise Project Management Office.

"Our participation on the task force, combined with the project management support provided by Commonwealth Medicine, is a great example of how the expertise and resources of the Medical School can be applied to meet the critical needs of our community," said James Leary, associate vice chancellor for community relations, who contributed to the task force.

The results of the extensive research and collaborations were presented in November 2009 in a detailed report that outlined four strategic recommendations:

1. Reconstitute the Board of Health.
2. Reorganize the administration of the DPH.
3. Utilize data in identifying community health priorities.
4. Formalize a cooperative working relationship with existing community health services.

UMMS has committed to supporting these recommendations, which were submitted to the Worcester City Council by the city manager in January 2010, by designating an adjunct faculty position for the city's Commissioner of Public Health and by conducting a community-wide public health needs assessment on behalf of the city in 2010. This Health Status Indicators Report will enable the DPH to better define priorities and work within city government and with the larger community to meet Worcester's public health needs.

The task force comprised a 22-member committee, which included co-chairs John O'Brien, president and CEO of UMass Memorial, and Dennis Irish, vice president of Vanguard Health System, and UMMS Chancellor Michael F. Collins, who served on the executive committee. Also from the Medical School were Abigail Averbach, MS, director of CWM's Office of Massachusetts Client Relations; Suzanne Cashman, ScD, professor of family medicine & community health and director of community health; Catarina Kiefe, MD, PhD, chair and professor of quantitative health sciences and professor of medicine; Robin Klar, DNSC, RN, assistant professor of nursing; Dale Magee, MD, assistant professor of clinical obstetrics & gynecology; and Michele Pugnaire, MD, professor of family medicine & community health and senior associate dean for educational affairs.

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