

## Collaborating for a Culturally Competent Future

Demographic trends reflect a U.S. population that is becoming simultaneously older and more culturally diverse with growing disparities in health status and outcomes. Who will step forward to meet the increased demand for culturally competent care? The School of Public Health is taking steps to ensure that well-trained health care professionals from diverse backgrounds will be ready to assume leadership. Working with community-based programs, the school is coordinating a comprehensive pipeline—a linked, sequential pathway of initiatives through which young people from underrepresented communities are exposed to the possibilities of working in public health, from elementary school through graduate school.

“Unfortunately, for many young people, public health career opportunities are a well-kept secret,” says **Jeff Oxendine, M.B.A., M.P.H. ’80**, director of the school’s Center for Public Health Practice. “Students are not aware of them in the same way that they know about doctors and nurses. We’re working to get the word out about public health careers.”

The school collaborates with individual programs that specialize in working with students at the intermediate, high school, and undergraduate levels, leveraging the combined efforts of all programs to help students progress towards their goals. Fundraising efforts are under way to extend the pipeline to the elementary school level. The collaborative approach makes it possible to track students effectively from one level to the next and make successful matches between students and programs.

At one end of the pipeline, the **Health Professions Partnership Initiative** (HPPI), led by the school’s Center for Community Wellness, works with students in local middle and high schools to help them explore health careers, build academic skills, expand their horizons, and increase their self-esteem. The program helps them to view college as an attainable goal. This past summer, for example, Oakland middle school students participated in HPPI’s first Summer Academic and Enrichment Program. They spent mornings on the Berkeley campus, studying math, English, and art; in the afternoons, they developed science projects or participated in internships at Highland Hospital, where they donned lab coats and clipboards to job-shadow health professionals.

Another pipeline collaborator, the **FACES for the Future** program at Children’s Hospital & Research Center of Oakland, is a three-year internship program that introduces underrepresented high school youth to careers in the health sciences. The students participate in hands-on internships and receive mentoring and support



Students participating in the Health Professions Partnership Initiative’s Summer Academic and Enrichment Program created a mural entitled “What is Health?” The mural depicts five aspects of health: fitness, nutrition, medical care, family, and friendship.

services, including tutoring, SAT and college preparation workshops, case management services, and a strong psychosocial program. The program started in 2000 with 30 students; out of that inaugural class, 26 graduated from the program, and 13 were accepted to University of California campuses. All of the graduates plan to pursue careers in health care. **Barbara Staggers, M.D., M.P.H. ’80**, is co-founder and co-director of the program.

Farther along the pipeline, **Health Career Connection** (HCC) engages undergraduate college students, bringing them together with the information, experiences, and support they need to discover and make well-informed choices about health care and public health career options. HCC matches students to internships, mentors, professional networks, and web-accessible information on health care management careers and educational options. HCC was founded by Oxendine and three other School of Public Health alumni.

“What’s powerful and unique about the pipeline strategy are the linkages developed between programs and students at all levels and the coordination of outreach and support efforts,” says Oxendine, noting that students who are farther along in reaching their career goals offer support to those who are at earlier stages. For example, 11 Berkeley M.P.H. students are currently serving as mentors for FACES students.

“The pipeline program is win-win for all participants,” says Oxendine. “Students get to discover and realize goals, organizations and individuals get to help and gain access to diverse talent, and the school contributes to future students and professionals who can address future public health challenges.”

— *Michael S. Broder*