

PUBLIC HEALTH STUDENT CAUCUS DRIVES NATIONAL STUDENT MOVEMENT

According to the Institute of Medicine's report, "The Future of the Public's Health in the 21st Century," the health of the public can be assured only through the cooperation and collaboration of many individuals in diverse institutional settings. The U.S healthcare delivery system spends more money than any other nation on protecting and improving health yet recent reports indicate that more than 41 million people in the U.S. are currently uninsured, there is a severe nursing shortage, managed care companies are crumbling, and September 11 and the subsequent anthrax attacks revealed many weaknesses in our public health infrastructure. The need to collaborate, share resources, reduce duplication, enhance economies of scale, and create a more effective and efficient U.S health system is evident, however system change has been incremental at best.

Recognizing the critical role of students and young health professionals to influence change, the Public Health Student Caucus, a student-run organization in official relations with the American Public Health Association (APHA) convened the leadership of 13 national student organizations at the first National Leadership Conference (NLC) for Students in Healthcare to form a new strategic alliance to collaborate to improve health. At the conclusion of the NLC, leaders from the 13 national students organizations representing more than 180,000 students in a variety of health and health related disciplines signed a memorandum of understanding to form the Student Health Alliance (SHA). With the formation of this alliance, the SHA has become the nation's largest alliance of students advocating for and working to improve the health of our communities guided by our nation's prevention agenda, Healthy People 2010.

The NLC, which was held in conjunction with APHA's 130th Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, PA, featured speakers and panelists from the national, federal, state and local levels including academia. The presenters, who included former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher, MD, PhD, discussed ways to help achieve Healthy People 2010 objectives and ways to improve health through collaboration. Planning is currently underway to reconvene the NLC in 2003 and to further increase student representation in the SHA. This effort was generously funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the American Academy of Physician Assistants, the Association of Academic Health Centers, and Association of Schools of Public Health, and was sponsored by the APHA.

Quotes:

1. "By strengthening the synergy between our disciplines, we can take a more proactive role in improving health by ensuring that the right resources are being utilized by the right people, at the right time through a coordinated effort. The SHA provides the national forum we need to build this synergy by working through our organizations to promote the need for collaboration and to gain a greater understanding of the value and benefit of working with other disciplines," said Chris Day, MPH, president of the Public Health Student Caucus, which engineered the development of the Student Health Alliance.
2. "Sometimes faculty and university administration are lead by their students, rather than leading them. This is one of those cases in which students recognized, in some cases before their national parent organizations, that they needed to come together to benefit the health of the public. Maybe this leadership can prompt more health professions education programs, their faculty and leadership to support these student efforts and lead our communities in improving their health."

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