

Health Director's Report April, 2014

- **Staff**
 - I hate to say this for fear of jinxing it...but we have no vacancies posted right now!

- **Various**
 - Sunday morning at 1:30, I gathered with about a dozen other people at the Chapel Hill Town Hall parking lot to participate in a Town and Gown field trip. The point to the gathering was to help those of us working to address the alcohol misuse/abuse in Chapel Hill understand what the town looks like in the wee hours of the morning as the bars are closing.
 - I've also had several meetings with UNC Health Care's leadership about partnership opportunities in the new ACA/ACO/MCO era. So far, no definitive plans, but it does seem that public health is on the radar screen as an important partner for population health.
 - We had our volunteer appreciation luncheon for our Medical Reserve Corps volunteers earlier this month. Liska attended and unofficially represented the Board of Health. Our speaker, Janet Hoy from the League of Women voters did a great job presenting information on the ACA progress to date.
 - I attended and presented at the Keenland/Practice Based Research Network conference in Lexington Kentucky. This is a unique national gathering of academics and practitioners where we try to identify mutual research priorities. That's actually harder than it sounds. I did a panel presentation with two researchers from ECU on our research that shows how the county health rankings are not generating the kind of press the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation desired/expected.
 - Speaking of the county health rankings...they came out again. We're 3rd healthiest in the state. Some of you have heard my concerns about these rankings, but since I have space I'll share again:
 - The data is old. In some cases the data can be as recent as 2-3 years old, but in other cases it is 5-10 years old.
 - The data is inconsistent from year to year. This variability makes it impossible to identify trends, which in smaller counties or low prevalence/incidence health issues is essential.
 - The release of this old, inconsistent data creates media noise that distracts from county-generated data releases such as the Community Health Assessment and annual State of the County Health Reports.
 - The methodology (which relies heavily on the social determinants of health) is incredibly complex and difficult to explain. Combine that with the fact that public health spokespeople are rarely trained media specialists and it results in the media taking control of the message, not public health.
 - Finally, our research found that the media coverage around the county health rankings often created either a "personal responsibility" frame (it is an individual's fault if he/she is obese) or a "horse race" mentality. Since the heaviest weighted items used to rank counties are related to income and education, the poorer counties ranked at the bottom and the wealthier counties ranked at the top. The media focused on the rank rather than what could be done to improve the rank. So, the counties ranked near the bottom, but not last, pointed out which counties were lower than they were. The American spirit of competition didn't really emerge in a "we can do better" response; instead the response was a shameful shrug that does nothing to improve the health of a county.
 - Speaking of data problems...the state informed us last month that they will not be providing county-level Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS) data at the county level. This is our primary data source for morbidity (i.e., what's making people sick) and health behaviors. We're trying to brainstorm other ways to get that information before we roll out our Community Health Assessment later this year.
 - Ending on a positive note! I've attended a couple meetings with the United Way of the Triangle and they are very interested in partnering with health leaders in their 4 county catchment area to reduce Adverse Childhood Experiences. Their focus would be on involving the business community and raising funds to fill in the identified gaps in the "pipeline to success" we discussed a few months ago.