

# Filling the Gaps Together



Photo source: <http://communityparamedic.org/>

Finding yourself in a ravine with no way out is the perfect setting for a nightmare. Fortunately for those in a “ravine” related to lack of healthcare access, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Community Paramedics, an emerging healthcare profession, is positioning themselves to not only lift patients out of the gap, but actually remove the gap.

In order to support this reality, PartnerSHIP 4 Health (PS4H), local public health and community partners in Becker, Clay, Otter Tail, and Wilkin counties working together to create an environment that supports improved health for all, facilitated a networking and informational opportunity for key stakeholders. PS4H secured Gary Wingrove (director of government relations and strategic affairs for Mayo Clinic Medical Transport, chair of the International Roundtable on Community Paramedicine, president of The Paramedic Foundation, and former paramedic/ EMS director) to speak on September 10, 2015 in Fergus Falls.

Key stakeholders invited were local healthcare administrators as well as EMS managers and personnel including Community Paramedics (CPs). Invitees included Essentia Health, Sanford Health, Lake Region Healthcare in Fergus Falls, St. Francis in Breckenridge, TriCounty Healthcare, PS4H local public health directors, and CPs and paramedics from Essentia Health, Sanford Health, Perham Health, TriCounty Healthcare, Fargo-Moorhead Ambulance, ASI, and Ringdahl’s Ambulance in Fergus Falls.

During these meetings, participants learned about the history of the community paramedic program, the value of the program to patients and healthcare settings, and the national effort to design performance metrics. The question and answer period focused on the dilemma shared by each EMS group regarding the selection and/or existence of metrics that could best capture and validate the community paramedic work. Underlying this focus was the sustainability of the community paramedic program. The entire group recognized the value in the program, but realized that until they can clearly communicate that value, reimbursement of their services is limited.

PS4H invited these same key stakeholders to attend the State Innovation Model Emerging Professions Learning Community (SIM-EPLC) Kick-off event in Minneapolis on September 24, 2015. The SIM-EPLC event brought together Community Paramedics (CPs), Community Health Workers (CHWs), the systems in which they work, and stakeholders to discuss pressing issues facing these evolving fields and opportunities to address challenges, and continues with four learning communities accessible via distance technology. Two of our regional ambulance services sent representatives and learned about how these two emerging professions complement one another. One community paramedic mentioned that “it would be great to be able to refer some of our clients to a Community Health Worker, and vice versa.”

Each of these opportunities gave PS4H a chance to invite, dialogue with, and learn from one another, propelling us towards integration of these emerging professions into our region. This will in turn offer increased healthcare access to low income and minority populations.

We planted the seeds and continue to move forward with our partners, knowing that these seeds will produce better care, better outcomes, and reduced healthcare costs for our community.

