



Looking for Health Improvement: Find it in the backyard

“PartnerSHIP 4 Health (PS4H) sets an example of how public health can engage clinics to consider preventive care. I was asked to speak at PS4H partner clinics. I was to bring credibility, outside opinion and support the work of PS4H. I brought value to PS4H, but they exposed me to new programs, tremendous innovation and creativity.”

Dr. Gary Oftedahl
Chief Knowledge Officer
ICSI (Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement)



Local Public Health Engages Clinics in Preventive Care

Picture this: You are at a clinic, motioned by the staff to walk towards the scale, asked to take off your shoes and step up onto the scale, and wait for the result. The nurse scribbles the number down on your chart, maybe making note of your height, too. Sound familiar?

And then what happens? In most cases, apparently, nothing much.¹ And this is a big problem because according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), nearly 68 percent of Americans are either overweight or obese. And, being at an unhealthy weight dramatically increases risk for chronic disease.

In order to address chronic disease risks, PartnerSHIP 4 Health has collaborated with the Institute of Clinical Systems Improvement (ICSI) and 14 health care organizations in Becker, Otter Tail, Clay, and Wilkin counties in an effort to implement best practice clinical guidelines for overweight and obesity, as well as tobacco use and exposure.

“During our work with medical providers we quickly realized we needed a physician to validate the message we were presenting to these partners. We arranged for Dr. Oftedahl, an expert on quality improvement, adaptive leadership and the collaborative process, to meet face-to-face with each of our partners, and reinforce our message,” said Kristin Erickson, PartnerSHIP 4 Health - Health Care Coordinator.

¹STOP (for Strategies to Overcome and Prevent) Obesity Alliance released data from recent research. It showed that while the vast majority (89 percent) of the 290 primary-care physicians surveyed felt responsible for helping patients manage their weight, most (72 percent) say they lack the resources and training to effectively counsel their overweight and obese patients.

“We are changing the office visit conversation from the provider telling the patient what to do, to listening to the patient, discovering patient goals and strengths, and letting the patient lead the conversation. Rather than providers giving generic advice, we are working towards engaging the patient in finding resources to improve their health,” said Oftedahl.

According to Erickson, “We are working with clinics to go beyond recording height and weight and tobacco use. We are encouraging providers to have a patient-centered conversation about healthy lifestyle behavior. For example many providers, after asking about tobacco use, now engage patients in considering a quit attempt, and then refer those ready to quit to the Call it Quits tobacco quitline service.

This work is important because it’s challenging to maintain a healthy weight or quit tobacco without the proper support. Medical providers are now assisting patients in setting personal health goals and connecting them to resources in the home, the clinic, or the community.”

The 14 clinics who teamed up with PartnerSHIP 4 Health in 2009 continue to meet on a quarterly basis to improve their systems and more effectively address the prevention and management of obesity and tobacco use.

However, the health care system cannot do this alone. According to Oftedahl, “We are at a crisis point and we need to look beyond just our health care systems. PartnerSHIP 4 Health does just that as they provide assistance and resources to schools, communities, and worksites in order that decisions made by patients in the health care setting are supported outside of that setting.”