Saving 100,000 Lives Over and Over Again:

Essential Physician Roles in the Public Health System

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Our goals today:

- Define the physician's role in New Mexico's public health system.

- Offer key resources and contacts needed to fulfill this role.

- Recognize the "two-way street" between public health agencies and physicians.

Scenario 1

- A clinician notes a remarkable cough in a 5-year-old who just started kindergarten. The child has vomited from the effort of coughing, but has no fever, and looks well between coughing spells. The mother is pregnant, holding a 2-year-old with a runny nose, and says "I may be in early labor, so please hurry". She has waived immunizations for her children. The clinician suspects pertussis. He orders a test, prescribes azithromycin for the child, and plans follow-up when lab results return.

- **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?**

Scenario 2

- A 24 year-old man without health insurance reports a two week history of nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, jaundice, and recent travel to Mexico. He is a cook in a restaurant, and his wife works in a hospital cafeteria. The ER physician suspects hepatitis A. She draws labs, tells the patient a complete recovery is expected, and suggests hepatitis A vaccine and IG for close contacts. The patient asks how much it will cost, and is told " it's pretty expensive." He leaves without paying his bill.

- **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?**

Scenario 3

- A medical resident, awakened at 3 AM, is asked to pronounce a patient dead and fill out the death certificate. The ward clerk and float nurse cannot find the death certificate instruction sheet. The physician pores over the document for a while, and then takes a stab at filling in the primary and contributing causes of death. This data is later entered into state, national and international data banks, and used to direct health system decisions and funding.

- **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?**

Scenario 4

A first-time mother brings her 5 day-old infant in for a scheduled well-child visit. When the baby begins to cry, the mother starts to cry, too. Her story tumbles out--her nipples are cracked and sore, she lost her job when she took time off to deliver, and she is out of money and food. Her partner is incarcerated, and she is estranged from her family. The time for this visit is up, and the appointment schedule is packed.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Three Steps to Public Health Success for Physicians

- **ASK THE QUESTION**
  - Is this a public health issue? If yes or maybe…

- **MAKE THE CALL**
  - Contact a public health partner.

- **USE THE SUPPORT SYSTEM**
  - Get the help you or your patient needs

Autopsy of failure…

When we fail in our role as partners in a public health system, we contribute to:

- preventable injury, illness, + death

- loss of accurate data to drive evidence-   based decisions in health care

- wasting of precious time and resources

What is public health, anyway?

- Clean air and water
- Wholesome food supply
- Prevention of contagious and chronic disease
- Emergency preparedness
- Surveillance for emerging illnesses
- Linking people to services and programs
- Providing leadership and advocacy to assure optimal health of the public

Care of the patient vs care of the community…

- **Traditional Medical Model**
- History, physical, lab results
- Diagnose and treat acute illness
- Work/environmental health screen
- Patient education and counseling
- Emergency medical and ICU care
- Case management and referral
- Assure quality of clinical care
- Care of fragile/chronically ill pts
- Care of pt with no ins/$$
- Find/hire skilled staff
- Figure out puzzling cases
- Create policies for office/hospital

- **Public Health Model**
- Monitor population health status
- Prevent and control epidemics
- Protect air,H20, food, environment
- Promote healthy behaviors
- Respond to disasters
- Mobilize community action
- Assure health care access/QA
- Link underserved/high risk w/care
- Provide "safety net" services
- Secure a skilled PH workforce
- Research for insight/solutions
- Lead sound health policy/planning

Healthy people vs. healthy communities

- Community A is made up of healthy, young people in their physical prime, but the community itself is quite "unhealthy", with high levels of many risk behaviors and high rates of preventable illness, injury and death.
  - GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF SUCH A COMMUNITY

- Community B provides optimal care and support to all its members, including extended family. It is safe, well-managed and offers comprehensive services—a very healthy community--but most members are dying.
 - GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF SUCH A COMMUNITY
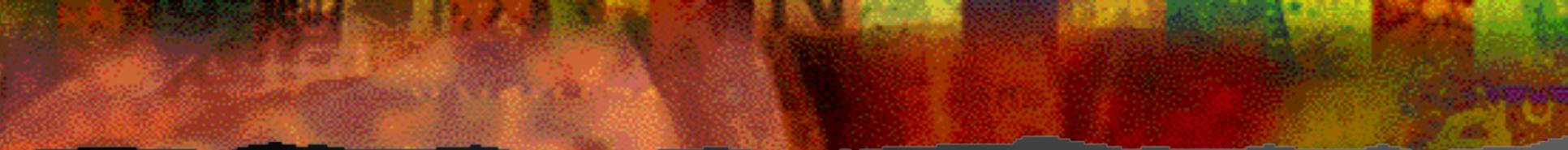
A Public Health System Versus A Public Health Agency

New Mexico Department of Health is a public health agency…
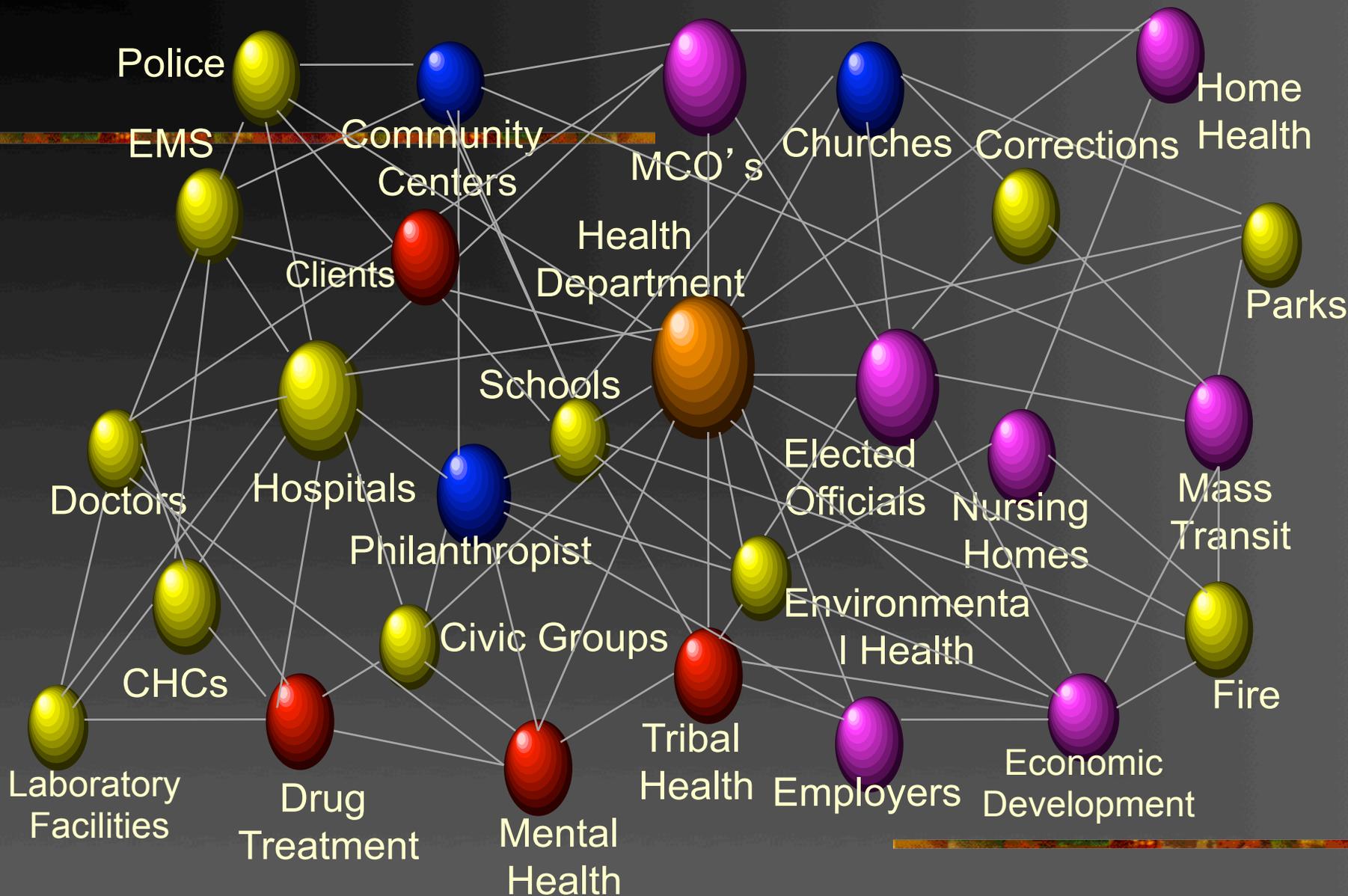
CONTACT INFORMATION

- 24/7/365 EPIDEMIOLOGY HOT LINE

  827-0006

LOCAL HEALTH OFFICE (One per County)

Albuquerque **841-4100**

Santa Fe **476-2600**

WEB SITES

NM Dept. of Health: www.health.state.nm.us

CDC: www.cdc.gov