What Are Communities of Practice?

Coined by Drs. Jonand Lovel and Elaine Wenger-tryaer, Communities of Practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and want to learn how to do it better as they interact regularly [Wenger-tryaer].

A Community of Practice (CoP) has three defining characteristics:

- Domain: CoP members share a commitment to a domain and seek a collective understanding of each other's competencies and basic understanding of their shared concern or passion.
- Community: CoP members engage in joint activities to learn how to improve their programs, share best practices, and explore collaborative growth. Each member contributes to the growth of others.
- Practice: A CoP is a group of practitioners who develop a shared repertoire of resources, such as experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems.

Tailoring CoPs to Academic Health Centers

Elements of a CoP: Implementation and Sustainability

Communities of Practice are not stagnant. The plan for sustainability must include a strategy to:

- Recruit and sustain a diverse team of academic, clinical, professional, policy, and lay audiences.
- Conduct forums regularly to identify, translate, and disseminate evidence-based best practices.
- Identify best strategies and venues for reaching different populations.
- Evaluate effectiveness of strategies in reaching targeted audiences.

Unleashing CoPs: Unique to Institutions

While CoPs share characteristics, CoPs can be tailored to serve the unique needs of the domain and the institution. From the case studies presented here by NCMeDH and CDHW, we found that CoPs are not standardized. CoPs at academic health centers work best when they are modified to the domain, community, or practice. With this toolkit, we present two case studies from the National Center for Medical Education, Development, and Research and the Center for a Diverse Healthcare Workforce.

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Tools

CDHW Website: www.ucdavis.com/ucdhw
CMCDE Website: www.cmced.org
Toolkit: https://ucdavis.com/ToolkitCDHP

References


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Case Study: Community Health Center Endorsed Applicant Program

In response to the persistent workforce shortages at Community Health Centers and the resulting disproportionate impact on health of low-income communities, the CHDFM convened a CoP with the California Primary Care Association, Federally Qualified Health Centers, and a regional association of health centers. This CoP aimed to deepen each participant’s understanding of the operations and needs of each member organization and to seek potential solutions to the workforce shortages. The group agreed that recruiting and supporting local students could be a robust pathway to physician recruitment at a health center. Over the course of 10 months, the group explored creating an Endorsed Applicant Program that would support talented pre-medical students who could attend the UC Davis School of Medicine and enter Graduate Medical Education programs at or near the health centers. CoP members became active participants in the admissions process at UC Davis School of Medicine and participated in developing curricula and clinical experiences in Community Health Centers. This Community Health Center CoP has led to joint grant submissions and looks forward to continuing the work over the next year. Also stemming from this collaboration, the California Future Health Workforce Commission has adapted the scope of this CoP as one of the top 10 priorities for California.