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Memphis models a youth-led movement to improve public health for all residents | Opinion

Besides being recognized locally, the University of Memphis Public Health CARES Club initiative is also getting attention globally.

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Soon after becoming dean of the University of Memphis School of Public Health, one of my top goals was to take our academic programs beyond the boundaries of the university campus into the local community with an intense focus on the health of youth.

The Public Health clubs started by the University of Memphis School of Public Health in the schools is built upon four key pillars of *Coping, Adaptability, Resilience and Empathy (CARE)*.

The public health clubs are a guide to help students confront their own physical and mental health challenges and develop a plan for their future careers.

Interest Grows in Public Health CARES Clubs

Within a few months, Public Health CARES Clubs have grown from three schools, and we plan to add seven more in the Memphis area. Their success is driven by student-led discussions about community public health challenges and students' ideas for possible solutions unique to their neighborhoods.

Hackathon competitions encourage the students to create public health campaigns of their own about the environment, climate health, non-chronic diseases, substance abuse, smoke and alcohol use, mental illness and sexually transmitted diseases.

Public health hackathons are organized at the School of Public Health an approach to encourage creative, innovative and out-of-box thinking among youth that will help translate

ideas into designing and developing public health solutions to support community health and well-being.

The campaigns lead to public health workshops, the celebration of a designated public health day and public health research and data projects.

Complementing the Public Health CARES Club, the University of Memphis School of Public Health is the first in the nation to create a public health dual-enrollment curriculum for eleventh and twelfth grade students that gives college credit if students enroll in public health courses at the University of Memphis.

Most importantly, the Public Health CARES Club helps young people see the benefits of a career, not just finding a job after graduation.

Their experiences have helped students get a vision about their individual scholastic gifts and talents and they can start a journey into the public health arena that has wide and varied options for career growth.

We help students understand public health not only has a need for people in the clinical and research areas but in others not always associated with public health. For instance, some students geared more for careers in the arts and culture could use a degree in public health to promote programs to alleviate stress and improve mental health.

Club participants ask themselves these 5 important questions at every meeting

At the Public Health CARES Club meetings, we focus on these five questions:

1. What do you eat each day?
2. How many hours do you sleep at night?
3. What are your hygiene habits?
4. When angry, how do you settle disputes with others and yourselves?
5. What course are you charting for a career?

These five questions serve as a basis for encouraging students to maintain good physical and mental health. What's learned in the classroom has a positive effect on other family members of their household.

Many youths show up at school lacking the training and encouragement. We are at a time now when more than half of the households in many communities are led by only one parent who

often has little time for important family discussions.

The “Memphis Model” – growing international interest in Public Health Cares Clubs

Besides being recognized locally, the University of Memphis Public Health CARES Club initiative is also getting attention globally. Clubs have been started in India, Malta and soon will be set up in Saudi Arabia and Portugal among other places.

We are also offering Public Health CARES club curriculum “Public Health In Action” in collaboration with the IEARN (International Education Academic Resource Network) to students and teachers across Algeria, India, Kazakhstan, Malta, Portugal, Taiwan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the United States.

What’s significant, the Public Health Clubs concept is getting national traction among the Association for Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH) that has a membership of more than 150 accredited schools and programs of public health nationwide.

I’m in my third year serving at the University of Memphis. Now, as it has been from the outset of my almost 15-year career in academics, my priority has been to help ensure “every student from everywhere” is given an opportunity for a successful career.

Fortunately, the leadership at the University of Memphis, specifically, those of us in the School of Public Health, have a soul-satisfying desire to help the next generation know the importance of their health and to help them set their sights on the exciting field of public health, whether in cities landscaped by concrete or in faraway island towns graced with tropical trees.

Let us assist you with starting a Public Health CARES Club in your community. As said by one public official, “To go fast, go alone. To go farther, go together.” We at the University of Memphis School of Public Health have made it our calling to “go together” in this important endeavor.

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