



University of Tennessee Uses Health of the Public Funding to Provide Health Education to Rural Youth, Encourage Medical Careers

Health of the Public: Rural Health Initiative Between the University of Tennessee Memphis and the Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service

SUMMARY

From 1993 to 1997, researchers at the [University of Tennessee, Memphis](#), provided health education to rural young people while exposing health professional students to rural communities and principles of population-based medicine¹.

The project was part of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's (RWJF) national program *Health of the Public: An Academic Challenge*.

The University of Tennessee, Memphis, which first received *Health of the Public* funding in 1990, established a partnership with the Tennessee 4-H organization, which ran a variety of programs for 175,000 young people ages 10 to 17, mostly in rural areas.

Key Results

During the RWJF-funded round, the *Health of the Public* project resulted in:

- A *Health of the Public* Team of 15–20 health professional students taught basic health skills and disease prevention to 4-H members attending week-long summer camps.

Team members were selected based on past experience, their interest in adolescents, and willingness to learn and work hard. The team led small group sessions on topics such as hypertension and organized less formal activities such as games and relays that reinforced health topics covered in the small group sessions.

¹ **Population-based medicine (or health care):** medicine that addresses the health care of whole populations rather than that of individual patients. It represents a community-based strategy for disease management and health promotion and places each individual patient within the context of the larger community made up of both sick and healthy people.

The campers were from diverse backgrounds with varied health risks. The hope was that the campers would pass the skills and information they learned on to other family and community members.

- Team members used their interactions with campers to talk about careers as health professionals. Campers were given addresses and phone numbers of team members and encouraged to keep in contact throughout the year.

Names of 4-H members who indicated an interest in a health related career were entered into the University of Tennessee's data bank and sent information about community- and campus-based health career-related opportunities.

- The Tennessee Rural Health Association and the Tennessee Medical Association worked with the University of Tennessee to enlist clinical sites in rural areas that would provide preceptor opportunities for members of the team.

In addition, the school enlisted rural hospitals to provide financial support to students who agree to practice for at least three years in an underserved area of Tennessee. Sites located near 4-H camps also participated in the team's camp activities.

- The University of Tennessee developed a variety of interdisciplinary, case-based, interactive teaching and learning experiences in population-based preventive medicine topics.

It made additions to computer-based campus resources on topics including primary care, injury prevention, agriculture chemical poisoning, risk appraisals, evidence-based medicine², and research methods.

A new pre-matriculation workshop, entitled MEDPREP, was designed to help students without the usual science-based undergraduate background, or who are older and entering medicine as a second career, prepare for medical school.

The University of Tennessee has found that many of these students are committed to practicing primary care in rural communities.

Other *Health of the Public*-related curricula include the first-year Preventive Medicine course, the second-year Introduction to Clinical Skills course, and third- and fourth-year clinical rotations with an emphasis on preventive medicine³.

² **Evidence-based medicine:** the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients. The practice of evidence-based medicine means integrating individual clinical expertise with the best available external clinical evidence from systematic research.

³ **Preventive medicine:** links the knowledge and skills of clinical medicine with the special skill sets of medical management and population health. Specialists work in diverse settings to promote health and to modify or eliminate the risks of disease, injury, disability, and death.

- The project produced a handbook for clinical teaching. The project director made two presentations at national meetings on preventive medicine curricula. See the [Program Bibliography](#) for details.

Funding

RWJF supported the project with a grant of \$150,000 between January 1993 and January 1997.

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