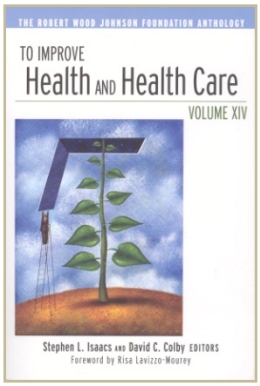
Foreword

RISA LAVIZZO-MOUREY

Excerpted from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Anthology:

To Improve Health and Health Care, Volume XIV



Edited by
Stephen L. Isaacs and
David C. Colby
Published 2011

Each of the past two volumes of *To Improve Health and Health Care: The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Anthology* has devoted several articles to a single topic. In 2009, the *Anthology* looked at the Foundation's work to promote health insurance for all Americans—a prescient choice given the subsequent enactment of health reform. Last year, it explored lessons that could be learned from programs that did not work out as expected. This year, we turn our attention to a subject that has deep roots in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's history and culture: improving the health and health care of vulnerable populations.

The Vulnerable Populations portfolio was created in 2003 as part of a reorganization that took place shortly after we announced a new impact framework designed to make our work more strategic. At the time, we had many programs that focused on the needs of vulnerable populations in their communities and harkened back to the very early days of our Foundation. These programs didn't have a single home. By putting programs in one portfolio, I felt we could do a better job of identifying the best among them. The Vulnerable Populations portfolio has since created a niche by identifying and supporting innovative programs at the intersection of health and the social factors that influence health—factors such as education, housing, race, class, and income. The portfolio has, for example, supported and helped spread programs to end chronic homelessness,[1] to reduce violence among intimate partners, and to coordinate social services for young people in the juvenile justice system.[2] In this volume, we explore programs to provide mental health services to refugees and immigrants, many of them suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder (see Chapter 4); to curb inner-city gang violence (see Chapter 5); and to bring dental care to Alaskans living in remote areas (see Chapter 6).

More than just supporting these programs, we nurture the most promising among them with the hope and expectation that they can become strong enough to, as David Colby and Stephen Isaacs state in Chapter 1, "enter the mainstream." This volume highlights

two innovative programs that we believe have great potential to be taken to scale: Playworks, which works with schools to make recess a healthy, fun, and essential part of the school day (see Chapter 3), and Green House®, which offers a model of a smaller, more humane kind of nursing home (see Chapter 2).

The Vulnerable Populations programs highlighted in this volume provide a glimpse into our work to improve the health of the neediest of our residents. Other programs have been featured in earlier *Anthology* chapters, as Colby and Isaacs note in the Introduction to Section Two. Collectively, they offer a more complete picture of the Foundation's efforts to improve the health of the nation's most vulnerable individuals. This kind of strategic grantmaking is often built on a foundation of solid policy research, and Chapter 7 describes the policy research on which the Foundation's efforts to reduce substance abuse rested.

The Vulnerable Populations portfolio also provides insights into a distinctive form of grantmaking. On the whole, we see strategic philanthropy–the kind that we have practiced in expanding health insurance coverage, reducing tobacco use, and improving end-of-life care–as the way we can have the greatest impact. Much of the Foundation's impact, however, comes from our Vulnerable Populations work, where we recognize a program that has the potential to dramatically change how services are delivered and at the same time has the potential to help individuals, families, and communities. We want to see that our resources are helping real people make progress toward better health and are moving us toward a healthier society. As this volume makes clear, it is possible, but not always easy, to do both.

Notes

1. Rog, D. J., and Gutman, M. "The Homeless Families Program: A Summary of Key Findings." *To Improve Health and Health Care, 1997: The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Anthology.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997; Diehl, D. "The Homeless Prenatal Program." *To Improve Health and Health Care, Vol. VII: The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Anthology.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004; Bornemeier, J. "The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Safety Net Programs." *To Improve Health and Health Care, Vol. IX: The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Anthology.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006.
2. Solovitch, S. "Reclaiming Futures." *To Improve Health and Health Care, Vol. XIII: The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Anthology.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010.