



MINNESOTA PUBLIC
HEALTH ASSOCIATION
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MPHA Policy Forum Notes
The Teenage Experience: What's healthy about it?
November 9, 2012

Moderator:

- Dave Golden, MPHA President, Director for Public Health and Communications at Boynton Health Center, UMN

Panel:

- Gloria Ferguson, Program Director for Health Start School-Based Clinics
- Mary Sue Hansen, Director of the Suburban Ramsey Family Collaborative (SRFC)
- Megan Schnobrich, sophomore at University of Minnesota, Senior Health Advocate at Boynton Health Service

Introductory Remarks by Dave Golden

Opening Commentary by panelists:

Gloria Ferguson:

- Adolescents are highly underserved
- Discussed many statistics about the health needs of teens
- Teens don't access care because: fear, shame, concerns over confidentiality, mistrust, may be uninsured
- School-based clinics (SBC) meet a critical need in meeting teen's needs
 - SBC use a multidisciplinary approach to care: mental health practitioners, nurse practitioners, nutritionists and dieticians, and medical assistants
- Definition of a "Healthy Teen": has knowledge, resources, and motivation to take good care of themselves with long-term sustainability

Mary Sue Hansen:

- Discusses the Suburban Ramsey Family Collaborative:
 - Collaborative, partnership to support youth in Ramsey County
- Complete integrated care: social services, mental health
- Focus: what works to support youth?
 - Do "reality testing": ask teens what works
 - Youth often identify stressors of peers before parents; recognize signs differently

Megan Schnobrich:

- Health Advocates at University of Minnesota:
 - Peer Advocacy health group in resident halls and greek housing
- In college, students are often making decisions about their health for the first time without their parents

- A “Healthy Teen”: can access programs available to them
- Alcohol use/ abuse is a huge problem at Boynton
- Importance of peer advocate health groups where students lead the groups and make decisions about how to lead the groups

Q1: How would you describe teens today?

Mary Sue Hansen:

- Brilliant, able to multitask, funny, they want to take good risks but want space to take these risks, want to belong, want to know people care about them

Megan Schnobrich:

- Excited, passionate about so many things

Gloria Ferguson:

- Serves primarily a high needs population in St. Paul
- The teens she works with are underserved, very much in need of support

Q2: What is a “Healthy Teen”?

Gloria:

- Has knowledge, resources to engage in healthy behaviors
 - This is very difficult in today’s society

Mary Sue:

- Knows they are on a journey, knows people care about them, have vision and goals, knows that it’s OK to ask for help

Megan:

- One who will go out and seek the attention they might need

Q3: In your opinion, what is the age range for teens?

Megan:

- Depends on your community; different communities are exposed to different things at different times
- In general: starts with middle school, ends after college

Gloria:

- According to most research, ages 10-24
- Ages 15-17 are commonly used in research because it is most easy to capture that data
- At her work, they serve anyone between ages 12-22

Mary Sue:

- Brain research says adolescence can go up to age 25, it is important to think about that when considering issues affecting teens

Q4: Can you talk about gender differences during these teen years?

Mary Sue:

- Boys often have a need for competition, need an outlet for aggression, role of testosterone in behavior during this time period

Gloria:

- At School-Based Clinics, mostly work with girls
 - Boys come in mostly for sports physicals and STD screens
 - Girls seek birth control and other services
- No matter boy or girl, you deal with what's in front of you

Megan:

- Generally, females talk more about health, seems to work more with females as a Health Advocate

Q5: How have risks been changing over time for teens?

Mary Sue:

- The media has many risks, particularly early exposure to violence on TV
- Cyberbullying as a huge problem, tragic suicides as a result of this

Megan:

- Nutrition is a new risk; college students often don't know how to feed themselves
- Sexual health, substance abuse, and mental health are all very important issues facing college students
 - It's important for parents to have conversations with their teens before they get out on their own

Gloria:

- Injury is responsible for most teen deaths today (versus illness 100+ years ago)
- Teen health really starts at infancy; the importance of developing positive attachments and supports builds a foundation for lifelong care

Q6: How do you go about involving teens (i.e., in program creation)?

Gloria:

- Tried student advisory groups, they didn't work because students couldn't stay after school
 - Instead, have had better success with short-term focus groups

Mary Sue:

- Minnesota Student Survey is very helpful; SRFC takes this very seriously
- Also use focus groups, exploring use of mentor-supported leadership

Megan:

- Important to have students helping other students; identify through a shared experience

Q7: What are cultural differences in your work?

Gloria:

- Mostly works with students of color and poor students
- Need to get used to asking: what is real for kids?
 - i.e. Among girls are expected to marry and reproduce at an earlier age; this affects approaches to contraception
- It is important to keep learning

Mary Sue:

- In suburban Ramsey County, demographics are rapidly changing

- At SRFC, strive to take people where they are at, ask questions, be aware of one's own cultural background, share, be reciprocal
- Learn as you go as equal partners

Q8: What's the deal with binge drinking?

Megan:

- The perception in college is that drinking is fun, and that it's expected
- Lack of knowing what else to do
- Advocates for alternatives to drinking at the U of M
 - Gophers After Dark at the student union offers free activities on weekends: movies, comedians, free food, etc

Mary Sue:

- Teens with co-occurring mental health issues are often self-medicating through alcohol

Gloria:

- It's so important to ask questions about substance use
 - A typical 15-minute clinic visit does not usually offer the opportunity to do so
 - It is also critical to have a system in place; if you ask the questions, you need to be able to also provide or offer a service to help the teen

Q9: Discuss barriers to mental health for our teens.

Gloria:

- Yes, there are barriers for everyone in Ramsey County regarding mental health
- Kids want mental health care services, but parents often think their teens wouldn't access such services
- Kids are also very aware of stressors in their families
- Advantage of SBC is that they offer services at school, which is such an important part of their identity at this time of their life

Mary Sue:

- Culturally specific providers are in very high demand
- Also need more understanding of trauma-informed care and the role of trauma
- Parents are sometimes struggling themselves; it's important to consider these circumstances

Megan:

- It is so important to relay information to students about the mental health resources they can get at the U of M

Q10: How do you pick up on homelessness and teens?

Gloria:

- "We ask, they tell us"; sometimes these conversations come out more with social workers
- There is a lot of transience among students; might pick up on this when they describe "where we stay" vs. "where we live"

Mary Sue:

- Homelessness and transience is an increasing problem for youth in Ramsey County
- Working to find options for youth, especially as they might turn 18 and be forced to move out

Megan:

- Doesn't have much experience with homelessness at the U
- Dave counters this by saying that it is rare, but they do sometimes encounter situations where students are homeless (living in their car, etc.) at the U

Q11: What would you like the Department of Health to focus on relating to teens?

Mary Sue:

- Trauma-informed work
- Co-occurring disorders
- Need to understand the importance of academic achievement and progress from a public health standpoint

Megan:

- Importance of marketing programs

Gloria:

- School-based clinics
 - Twin Cities are the only place in Minnesota with SBC



Next Policy Forum:

Friday, January 25, 2013... Teens and Sexuality—What's new beyond the birds and the bees?

Hope to see you there!