



Buncombe County: Making Change a Success!

In the past decade, public health departments have experienced a great reduction in funding while expectations have remained the same. In other words, they must continue to meet the needs of their communities and provide quality care with less resources and funding.

The leaders at Buncombe County Health and Human Services (BCHHS) Department of Health quickly recognized the only way to do this was with change. Doing it “the way it always has been done” wasn’t working. Change was mandatory to meet the needs of the county’s growing, widely diverse client population.

The Challenges

For change to be successful, leaders must make the purpose of the change clear to everyone, create a sense of desire rather than fear, anticipate potential problems, build trust, have courage and make change a top priority. They must be willing to challenge the standard approach to “the way it always has been done” and find ways to maneuver around the old practices and policies.

However, it is not the leaders alone that make change successful; it takes an entire team. When BCHHS’s Medical Director, Dr. Jennifer Mullendore, was asked what has made the changes at BCHHS successful, Dr. Mullendore stated, “We have a good mix here at BCHHS. We have our core staff, who have dedicated years of service to Public Health, partnering with staff that are new to Public Health. The newer staff bring a fresh prospective, and the experienced staff bring the knowledge. The two together can generate innovative ideas. It creates an

outstanding team that works together building on each other’s strengths.” Dr. Mullendore also explained that Quality Improvement (QI) teams have been created to review every program by questioning whether patient’s needs are being met and how efficiencies can be improved in processes. The staff is now more involved in policies and procedures, allowing more feedback and input.

The leaders at BCHHS have successfully challenged “the way it always has been done” and BCHHS’s outstanding teams have made the challenges a success.

The Changes

As with numerous health departments, many services have been lost due to lack of resources and funding. In 2010-11 Adult Primary Care, Prenatal Health, and Child Primary Care could no longer be provided at BCHHS. However, the remaining core services of Family Planning and Pregnancy Testing, Breast Cancer and Cervical Cancer Control, STD Testing and Treatment, Immunizations, Travel Vaccines, and TB Testing are still flourishing. In addition, to better serve the community, BCHHS offers an STD express clinic, STD evening clinic, and partners with other resources in the community to offer numerous outreach clinics.

Another major change occurred in 2011 when the Department of Health consolidated with the other Health and Human Services Divisions. The benefits in consolidating allowed clients to have access to multiple services in one location. Because of the consolidation, the Department of Health moved from Woodfin Avenue to Coxe Avenue.

In 2014, Buncombe County Health and Human Services, experienced the daunting task of implementing an Electronic Medical Record (EMR). This task required hours of planning, collaborating and training.

BCHHS's Department of Health moved again in 2015 from Coxe Avenue to their now temporary location on French Broad Avenue. The move was made due to the need to expand the Coxe Avenue building. The goal of the expansion is again to better serve the growing, diverse client population by increasing services in one location.

In the last decade, BCHHS's Department of Health has endured and prevailed through a mountain of changes. Without great leaders and a dedicated team, these changes could not have been successful.

Dr. Mullendore stated, "Change is scary; however, we had to look at it as a positive. Reframing and restructuring was an opportunity to question what we are doing and how we can do it better."

BCHHS Laboratory

Everyone at BCHHS has certainly felt the impact of each change. There was a significant impact on the laboratory. They had to readjust, restructure and transform. The lab performs approximately 2,100 clinical tests a month and around 25,000 per year. Through each transformation, never once has the quality of testing provided to their clients been affected.

The core laboratory consists of two full-time personnel, Laboratory Manager, Kellie Green, MLT (ASCP) and Marilyn Shipley, MLT (ASCP). There are also two part-time personnel, Tracy Thatcher and Linda Gardner. In addition to the core lab staff, six additional testing personnel perform wet mount testing in the clinical area. They are Bonny Runion, FNP, Wendy Young, PA, Beth Edney, FNP, Barbara Toth, RN, Dr. Mullendore and Dr. Posner.

BCHHS Laboratory Manager, Kellie Green, stated, "One of the reasons we successfully made it through was because of our leadership here at BCHHS. We have always had full support from our Director of Nursing, Ellis Vaughan, our Health Director, Jan Shepard, our Medical Director, Dr. Jennifer Mullendore and our Practice Manager, Paul Watson. However, the main reason we made it is our laboratory team."

Kellie and Marilyn have been working together since 2001. In 2013, Kellie became BCHHS's Laboratory Manager. When asked what makes the laboratory team special, Marilyn stated, "Kellie and I have always clicked from the day Kellie started here fresh out of MLT school. What I start, she finishes and vice versa. We stick together like glue." Kellie said, "We go together, complementing each other, and there is no drama." They work together, building on each other's strengths and weaknesses, with a common goal to provide excellence service to their clients.

Kellie and Marilyn worked together with the help of Dawn Pressley, Business Systems Analyst, to implement their EMR in 2014. Dawn collaborated with the laboratory to assure that the laboratory portion of the EMR was compliant with CLIA regulations. Marilyn stated, "The lab could not have made the transition without Dawn's knowledge and support. Dawn was patient and stayed by our side through the entire process." The team worked together to make the implementation a success.

Again, working together, the BCHHS lab and their partners were able to accomplish the impossible. In 2015, they moved from their Coxe Avenue building to their now temporary location on French Broad Avenue in one day! Marilyn stated, "We moved that morning and by the afternoon, we were seeing patients at the new location." They all worked together to make the move as painless as possible on their clients.

Through each change the BCHHS Laboratory team has worked together for a common goal, which is

to treat each client with respect and dignity while always looking for better ways to serve their clients. Marilyn stated, "The positive comments from our clients and staff is what give us encouragement to keep going."

Summary

To make change a success, it takes great leaders and an outstanding team to make it happen. BCHHS has continuously worked together for a common goal. They understand what each of them brings to the table, building on each other's strengths, always looking for a way to better serve Buncombe County residents. Kudos to Buncombe County Laboratory staff and their partners! They are dedicated to the cause and have the desire to do what it takes to make it work. In her role as Laboratory Manager, Kellie Green said it best, "You must have the compassion, desire and dedication to work in Public Health, and that is what we have here at BCHHS. We are a team that is compassionate and dedicated to Public Health, making change a success!"



BCHHS: A team geared for success!

References:

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