

The NSPAPPH: Answering the Call

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The demand for policy and environmental changes to increase healthy behaviors, such as physical activity, generates a call for a changing workforce. Today's public health practitioner must be able to step beyond the instructional settings to influence organizations, corporate and government alike, to adopt formal and informal policies, and to influence change within physical and social environments. This call for influence, indeed, a call for leadership, is being answered by today's physical activity practitioners.

Network of Professionals: Raising the Bar

The National Society of Physical Activity Practitioners in Public Health (NSPAPPH, or the Society) was created with the idea of forming a network among practitioners working to promote physical activity, particularly through policy and environmental change.

Organized in 2006, the Society has grown to approximately 200 members. Collectively, we address all levels of the socio-ecological model, persons of all ages and abilities, and all settings including the community environment, schools, faith communities, after-school programs, worksites, and health care. Through the Society, practitioners have the opportunity to learn from others engaged in similar efforts and share resources, as well as successes and challenges.

The Society recognized early on that practitioners needed to develop a core set of competencies to address the complex issues surrounding physical activity in public health, especially as they relate to policy. Additionally, the growing body of practitioners needed a vehicle to validate their skill set for the marketplace. Working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Society developed Core Competencies based on the CDC's benchmarks. These competencies were then developed, in partnership with the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), into the new Physical Activity in Public Health Specialist certification.

Newkirk is a former president of the National Society of Physical Activity Practitioners in Public Health.

Programs, Products, and Services

With limited resources, including staff time and funding, the necessity to optimize productivity across programmatic and geographic boundaries became obvious. The Society created a web-based matrix of member resources. Searchable by setting and state, the matrix allows members the ability to learn from and utilize existing resources rather than create new ones from scratch.

Members share resources and experiences through routine educational opportunities. This sharing includes practical experiences such as partnership efforts to influence policy and environmental change.

Public Agenda: A Collective Voice

Practitioners are addressing formal and informal policy change at the federal, state, local, and organizational levels. This includes changes such as increasing pedestrian friendly environments through sidewalks, bike lanes, and greenways. Other examples include increasing physical activity and physical education in schools, working with faith communities to provide and promote walking trails and exercise classes, worksites that allow physical activity breaks, and after-school programs providing physical activity in proportion to the time the children spend in care.

Practitioners have the opportunity to share their policy efforts, including successes and challenges, through the Society. While every practitioner has the opportunity to influence change to promote healthy behavior, we believe that the collective voice of the Society will resonate loud and clear, ringing out in decision makers' ears.

As the membership and accompanying skill sets grow, the Society will develop policy priorities representative of its experienced member base. These policy priorities will not only guide the efforts of individual practitioners but will be presented to decision makers and funders.

Practice-based Evidence

In addition to reliance on the best scientific evidence for developing sound public health practice, oftentimes we must rely on practice-based evidence to inform public

health programming. This relationship will not only strengthen the efforts of practitioners in the field but improve the training of those to follow.

Striving for Prevention

The work of the physical activity practitioner impacts virtually all aspects of public health, from chronic disease, to mental health and injury reduction. Certainly, physical activity can be seen as fundamental for improving the quality of life.

The Society is the professional body and voice of the physical activity in public health practitioner. We are taking the lead to train and retool our workforce through the sharing of resources and experiences and the collection of a common advocacy voice.

Through policy and environmental change, we are striding to prevent and reduce the burden of disease and improve quality of life, in all settings and for all persons, by providing increased opportunities for physical activity.