

INSIGHTS IN PUBLIC HEALTH

From *Hale* to *Kauhale*: Public Health, Social Work, and Aging

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Insights in Public Health is a monthly solicited column from the public health community and is coordinated by HJMPH Contributing Editors Tetine L. Sentell PhD from the Office of Public Health Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa and Donald Hayes MD, MPH from the Hawai'i Department of Health in collaboration with HJMPH Associate Editors Lance K. Ching PhD, MPH and Ranjani R. Starr MPH from the Hawai'i Department of Health.

Effective July 1, 2016, the Office of Public Health Studies (OPHS) at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa (UHM) joined with the Department of Social Work and the Center on Aging under the Myron B. Thompson School of Social Work (MBT SSW) led by Dean Noreen Mokuau. Each unit (or *hale*) is strong, but the merger recognizes that it takes a village (or *kauhale*) to solve some of the intractable health and social problems facing us today. The shared vision of the *kauhale*, housed within the MBT SSW, is "achieving social justice and health equity for the people of Hawai'i and citizens in a changing world." This article presents the rationale for the merger and provides examples of how the three units are working together in this synergistic collaboration.

The Three Units

The OPHS offers the Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Public Health, the Masters of Science (MS) in Epidemiology, the Masters of Public Health (MPH, with specializations in Epidemiology, Health Policy and Management, Native Hawaiian and Indigenous Health,¹ and Social Behavioral Health Sciences), the Doctorate in Public Health (DrPH) in Community-Based and Translational Research² and the PhD in Epidemiology. The BA in Public Health, opened in 2014, prepares undergraduate students for a wide array of careers and career paths in health and provides a macroscale perspective on healthcare.³ The unit currently is directed by Dr. Kathryn L. Braun. The mission of the OPHS is to advance the health of the peoples of Hawai'i, the nation, and the Asia-Pacific region through knowledge, discovery, innovation, engagement, inclusion, and leadership. <http://manoa.hawaii.edu/publichealth/>

The Department of Social Work includes a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program; a Masters of Social Work (MSW) program, with both Manoa and Distance Education-based options, and with specializations in Behavioral Mental Health, Children and Families, Health, and Gerontology; and a PhD in Social Welfare. Dr. Meripa Godinet serves as Chair. The mission of the DSW is to provide educational excellence that advances social work with its focus on social justice. The principal responsibility is the generation, transmission, and application of knowledge for the global enterprise with special attention to Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander, and Asian populations in our state and region. <http://www.hawaii.edu/sswork/>

The Center on Aging's mission is to enhance the wellbeing of older adults and those involved in eldercare. The Center on Aging is committed to interdisciplinary and collaborative efforts in research, educational programs, and service to the community, with a focus on the multicultural populations of Hawai'i and the Pacific Region. It is directed by Dr. Margaret A. Perkinson. The Center's goals are to better prepare the State and the Pacific Basin for the challenges related to an aging society through teaching, research, and service. <http://www.hawaii.edu/aging/>

History and Rationale for the Merger

While most professional accreditation bodies accredit degrees (eg, the BSW or MSW), the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) accredits structures (ie, schools vs programs). When the former School of Public Health was accredited in 1967, it offered MPHs in the five required specializations and thus was accredited as a school. However, dozens of faculty members retired in the 1990s to take advantage of a state-sponsored early-out scheme, resulting in insufficient faculty in biostatistics and environmental health. Thus, in 2002 the school was downsized and accredited as a program of public health (called the Office of Public Health Studies or OPHS) under the John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM). There was an expectation that OPHS would reemerge as an autonomous school of public health; however, budget shortfalls and competing priorities have not supported this reemergence. Nonetheless, OPHS has been continuously accredited and graduating students since 2002. Our most recent accreditation cycle is 2015 to 2022.

Although JABSOM was initially a good home for OPHS, JABSOM's move to the Kaka'ako Campus presented a number of logistical challenges. At the same time, OPHS was collaborating with MBT SSW in an increasing number of areas, including recruitment, teaching, research, and service. Also, Social Work and Public Health offered similar degrees—the baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral degrees—on the same campus. Salary structures, working conditions, and evaluation criteria for faculty members in the two programs were very similar as well.

The inclusion of the Center on Aging within the MBT SSW was logical given the years of collaboration across OPHS, Social Work, and the Center on Aging. The Center on Aging was established in 1988 under Dr. Anthony Lenzer as a free-



Ha Kupuna National Resource Center for Native Hawaiian Elders, including staff from Public Health, Social Work, and the Center on Aging and advisors expert in aging and Hawaiian health.



Joint Recruitment Committee, including representatives from Public Health, Social Work, Medical Technology, Nursing, the Health Careers Opportunity Program, and the Pre-Health Pre-Law Advising Center.

standing unit, and was transferred to the School of Public Health in 1993. The next two directors—Dr. Lawrence Koseki and Dr. Kathryn L. Braun—were appointed from the public health faculty to manage the Center on Aging’s gerontology certificates and extramurally funded research. In 2008, the COA was transferred to the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research (OVCR), under which Dr. Colette Browne from Social Work served as interim director from 2009 to 2012, and Dr. Christy Nishita served as interim director from 2013 through 2016. Drs. Browne and Braun worked with MBT SSW Dean Noreen Mokuau and the OVCR to establish the Barbara Cox Anthony (BCA) Endowed Co-Chairs in Aging (filled in 2015 by Drs. Braun and Mokuau) and a full-time director position (filled in 2017 by Dr. Perkinson).

The merger of these three units was consistent with the University’s strategic goals to increase experiential learning opportunities across the curriculum, to expand and create transdisciplinary opportunities, to increase student success, to promote scholarly work that informs policies and practices that benefit communities, and to increase partnerships and sharing of expertise with community organizations. It also is consistent with the UHM’s financial plans to increase efficiency.

Collaboration and Synergy

Although each unit has demonstrated competence and productivity as a free-standing entity, the merger encourages greater collaboration and synergy that will enable enhanced and more efficient service to students, the professions, and the community. In this section, we detail specific activities that have been facilitated or strengthened by the merger in the areas of recruitment, research, instruction, and community service.

Recruitment

Public Health and Social Work have been collaborating since 2009 on student recruitment and engagement efforts. Initially, both units were members of *Ho‘ola Malamalama*, a group dedi-

cated to recruiting students (especially Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander, and Asian students) into the health professions. Other members of *Ho‘ola* represented Medical Technology, Nursing, Food Science, Human Nutrition & Dietetics, Kinesiology & Rehabilitation Sciences, and the UHM Pre-Health/Pre-Law Center (PAC). The *Ho‘ola* group conducted student outreach activities at local high schools, community colleges, and community health events. It also hosted local high school students interested in the health professions on visits to the UHM campus.

Subsequent budget cuts and changes in leadership have limited the amount of formal programming that *Ho‘ola Malamalama* can undertake. However, representatives from Public Health and Social Work continue to conduct joint recruitment and outreach efforts. Congruent with our shared mission—achieving social justice and health equity for the people of Hawai‘i and citizens in a changing world—recruitment strategies have been developed to appeal to local students interested in helping their communities within a social justice and health equity framework.

The two primary types of recruitment events are resource fairs and in-class presentations. During resource fairs, representatives request that their display tables be located next to each other. Many students interested in social justice and health equity are not sure of their career options, and having social work and public health representatives close to each other facilitates explanations about the similarities and differences in these professions. For in-class presentations, program representatives share information as a single unit with multiple degree options, rather than in sequence. Students learn that these fields of study take an ecological view, understanding that behavior is influenced by individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and public policy forces. These fields also require students to work with health, social service, and policy organizations to apply professional knowledge and skills. Social Work emphasizes a strengths perspective in a practice model that includes engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation when

working with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Public Health takes a population approach that focuses more on community assessment, surveillance, health education, program planning and administration, evaluation, research, and advocacy. Representatives also recount stories of former students who earned advanced degrees in both Public Health and Social Work, explaining how these degrees can be complementary.

As an example, Dr. Denise Nelson-Hurwitz (Public Health) and Mari Ono (Social Work) recently participated in the Moanalua High School College and Career Fair. Together, they presented to groups of high school students about educational and career opportunities within our social justice and health equity framework. Areas stressed were our commitment to community, opportunities for students to help individuals and communities, and our emphasis on practice-based education. Then the specific degrees were described, as well as the career options for graduates from each field. Recruitment efforts are supported by both the DSW Office of Student Services and the OPHS Diversity and Recruitment Committee. Trained, volunteer student ambassadors from the programs, along with paid Manoa Peer Advisors, are important members of the team.

Research

Public Health, Social Work, and the Center on Aging promote collaborative and interdisciplinary research within the university and with other academic and community partners. Their research foci include basic as well as applied, translational, and community-engaged research on local, national, and international levels. For example, Ha Kupuna National Resource Center for Native Hawaiian Elders is a collaborative project that seeks to create and disseminate knowledge on the health of *kupuna* (elders) to improve *kupuna* health and the delivery of services to them. The project was established in 2006 with funding from the US Administration on Community Living, and it currently is funded through 2021. Dr. Colette Browne from Social Work leads the program, and several faculty members from Social Work, Public Health, and the Center on Aging participate. A recent publication from Ha Kupuna reports on the 2010 life expectancy estimates for the five largest ethnic groups in Hawai'i. Findings suggest that life expectancy is increasing for all groups, but life expectancy for Native Hawaiians is 4 years shorter than for Caucasians, 8 years shorter than for Japanese, and 11 years shorter than for Chinese in Hawai'i.⁴ This publication received strong media coverage, showing its relevance to the state. Other publications more broadly explore health disparities experienced by Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander elders,⁵ advantages and disadvantages of using various research methods when investigating indigenous health,⁶ dementia among indigenous elders,⁷ and experiences of Native Hawaiian elders in Hawai'i and California. <http://manoa.hawaii.edu/hakupuna/>

Another project that encompasses faculty from the three units is RMATRIX-II (2014-2019), the RCMI Multidisciplinary And Translational Research Infrastructure eXpansion

program. The goal of RMATRIX-II is to support early-stage investigators, especially those from underrepresented groups, who are dedicated to improving the health of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos. Any faculty member can request RMATRIX services for assistance with basic research, clinical research, community-based research, biostatistics, bioinformatics, clinical research services, and regulatory questions. Social Work and Public Health play key leadership roles. Specifically, RMATRIX II is co-led by the Deans of JABSOM and the MBT SSW, and a faculty member from public health co-leads the community-based research core. In their RMATRIX leadership roles, representatives from Social Work and Public Health facilitate recruitment of community-based researchers and advise university researchers on best ways to work in and with Hawai'i communities experiencing health disparities. RMATRIX II is funded by the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities. <http://rmatrix.jabsom.hawaii.edu/index.jsp>

On the level of individual grants, faculty members from Public Health, Social Work, and Medicine are working with community collaborators on the Partnerships for Improving Lifestyle Intervention (PILI) Tech project, funded by RMATRIX-II. This project builds on a 12-year community-based participatory research partnership to develop and test the PILI Lifestyle Program, which is a cultural adaptation of the Diabetes Prevention Program Lifestyle Intervention for local Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders communities. This intervention is adapted to Hawai'i and has been shown to be effective in promoting weight loss.⁸⁻⁹ The goal of the Tech project is to adapt the PILI Lifestyle Program into a self-directed, online program. The PILI Tech project is lead by co-PI's Dr. Claire Townsend Ing, a faculty member at the JABSOM Department of Native Hawaiian Health who received her doctoral degree from OPHS, and Dr. Seunghye Hong, a faculty member at the DSW, with contributions from Dr. Denise Nelson-Hurwitz of the OPHS.

The Center on Aging is partnering with several units on campus, as well as with a number of community partners, on the Hawai'i Alzheimer's Disease Initiative (HADI), which strives to strengthen the dementia-capability of local communities. The project builds on the existing capacity of professionals and organizations to provide support to older adults with memory loss or dementia and their caregivers. It is funded by the federal Administration for Community Living's Alzheimer's Disease Initiative-Specialized Supportive Services Program. This project dovetails with the Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Project of JABSOM's Department of Geriatric Medicine, which engages faculty and students from Social Work, Public Health, Nursing, Medicine, and Pharmacy in inter-professional education opportunities in geriatrics.

Instruction

In the past year, the three MBTSSW units collaborated on the development and piloting of an undergraduate course on aging called Back to the Future: Aging in Today's Society. The BCA

Endowment provided the funding, and the COA director and faculty members in Public Health and Social Work contributed to ideas for the course. A Public Health faculty member, Dr. Catherine Pirkle, piloted the course in fall 2016, and an application has been submitted to make the course permanent. Cross-listed in Public Health and Social Work, the goal is to attract students majoring in these, as well as other, subjects into gerontology. The course instructor can utilize a number of faculty members from the three units as guest lecturers.

Another potential area of collaboration is between the DrPH program and PhD in Social Welfare. With more attention to economies of scale, units are strongly encouraged to cancel classes with fewer than five enrolled students. However, most doctoral programs are small, admitting only two to four students per year. Thus, it benefits doctoral programs to identify courses in other units that can fulfill their students' doctoral degree requirements. Already, many PhD in Social Welfare students enroll in Public Health's graduate course on program evaluation, while many DrPH students have enrolled in Social Work's qualitative methods course. The two doctoral programs are continuing to identify courses in each other's units that can serve as substitutes for required courses, as well as for electives.

A third area of collaboration was the "Teach-In / Act Out" event organized by students from Public Health and Social Work in February 2017. More than 125 individuals attended, including students, faculty members, and community members. Attendees had their choice of multiple break-out sessions led by speakers from across campus and the community on such topics as the Affordable Care Act, indigenous rights, sovereignty, climate change, women's health, LGBTQ health, housing, and immigration. The Teach-In helped showcase the cross-cutting nature of public health and social work, and also demonstrated the need for more interdisciplinary work across the university. The event organizers continue to work with speakers and participants towards creating a broader on-campus movement for community building, policy change, and advocacy.

Community Service

The three units provide service to the community. Many areas of collaboration are with community groups in the field of aging. For example, the COA, in collaboration with the Hawaiian Pacific Gerontological Society and representatives of Social Work and Public Health, sponsors an annual Career and Job Fair in Aging. In 2017, the fair attracted 35 vendors who were looking for employees with an interest in and a passion for eldercare. The vendors included architecture firms, health plans, assisted living facilities, nursing facilities, non-profit service providers, home care providers, and a real estate firm. There even was a display by "de-cluttering" experts. More than 100 students participated in the job fair.

All three units also collaborate to provide continuing education for community-based professionals. Through a grant from the Healthcare Resources and Services Administration, Dr. Valerie Yontz of Public Health organizes 18 or more continuing education sessions each year, and these are accessible by computer to individuals across the state. Trainings cover health topic areas, such as mental health and tobacco use, as well as skill areas, such as program leadership and data analysis. More than 1,000 different community-based professionals attend at least one training a year, and continuing education credits are available for social workers, health educators, certified substance abuse counselors, and dietitians.

Plans for Further Collaboration

We anticipate that demand for degrees in Public Health, Social Work, and Gerontology will grow as the population ages, as new diseases emerge, and as new groups experience health and social disparities. These and other trends will lead to further collaboration across these disciplines. Future areas under discussion are developing a dual MPH-MSW degree program, resurrecting the certificates in aging and public health, expanding inter-professional education opportunities, enhancing our indigenous programs, increasing community education offerings, and joining forces on research projects. We strongly believe that this merger will increase the number of well-trained professionals, researchers, and advocates for health equity and social justice.

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