Population Health
Health Systems Science Learning Series

POPULATION HEALTH OVERVIEW

Traditionally, health care has been focused on the individual, a 1:1 experience between doctor and patient. However, increased awareness of the limitations of health care has helped expand the conversation from the health of individuals to the health of populations.

Population health is the health outcomes of a group of individuals, including the distribution of health outcomes within the group. Population health recognizes that an individual’s health status is linked to his or her behavior, home, work, school and other environments and not just determined by his or her interactions with the health care system.

Most factors that impact health are outside of the health care system’s walls and occur while people are living their lives. While the formal definition of population health references health outcomes, many providers also use the term “population health” to describe the activities that a health care organization undertakes to support the health of groups of people. Population health encompasses health promotion and disease prevention of a specific group of individuals.

Public health is what we as a society do collectively to assure the conditions in which people can be healthy. Public health includes an extensive network and many relationships at the community level. The public health system involves all public, private and voluntary entities that contribute to the delivery of essential public health services within a jurisdiction. Compare the two in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Health</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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|                  | Improve the medical outcomes of a group of individuals | Physicians, health professionals, health departments, payers, employers, etc. | - Health promotion  
- Early detection  
- Disease management |
| Public Health | Improve the health of the community | All public, private and voluntary organizations, including doctors, employers, schools, law enforcement, civic groups, etc. | - Policy and laws  
- Actively engage the public in health action |
IMPLEMENTING POPULATION HEALTH

Population health is a collection of actions that support groups of patients to maintain or optimize their health. Implementing population health means moving beyond traditional thinking to help patients address other factors that can influence their health.

Limitations in U.S. health care:

- A focus on sick care over prevention and wellness
- Siloed and fragmented efforts for health and health care
- Inadequate assimilation and use of data
- Suboptimal patient engagement
- Inequality and inequity in health and health outcomes
- Reimbursement systems, incentives, education and culture that support the status quo

The vision is for population health to improve as more and more of these limitations are addressed. Examples of these limitations being addressed in health care are outlined below.

IMPROVING POPULATION HEALTH

There are many resources for hospitals and clinics to implement population health across all areas of care.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Payment trends</th>
<th>New models of care and different payment models have had a huge impact on the advancement of population health in health care. Two examples are accountable care organizations (ACOs) and patient-centered medical homes (PCMHs).</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New tools supporting population health</td>
<td>Examples of new tools are EHRs, analytic software, biosensors and telehealth.</td>
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<td>New types of health care workers</td>
<td>Roles for health care workers are ever-changing. A couple examples of the new types of workers in the industry are nurse care managers, community health workers and patient navigators.</td>
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<td>Population health initiatives</td>
<td>There are local and national initiatives that support population health. Examples are: Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers, Homeless Patient Aligned Care Teams and Million Hearts.</td>
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QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- What are the drivers of population health in the United States?
- What is the difference between population health and public health?
- Why isn’t population health being addressed more broadly?
- How is population health focus being implemented in the health care setting?