

Health Planning is Alive and Well!

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Several people have told me recently that they believe "health planning is dead." This lamentable observation seems to be based on the belief that federally-funded regional health planning is the only model that can legitimately be called health planning. The "death of health planning" observation can also be traced to the development of multi-hospital systems and networks that effectively shift strategic planning away from the local level and up to the corporate level.

However, from my vantage point as a health planner at a state public health department, I must counter this contention and assert that health planning is alive and well. I believe health planning is undergoing a renaissance. Here's why I think that:

- Community-level health planning is a rapidly growing phenomenon in the public health sector. The development of community health planning tools such as APEXPH have facilitated the assessment and planning process in local public health jurisdictions across the nation.
- The increased interest of hospitals in conducting community health planning activities has been prompted by accreditation requirements, community benefit initiatives and the development of community planning tools by HRET, VHA, AHA and others.
- There is a renewed interest in strategic planning in the public health and health care sectors, stimulated by rapid changes in the health care marketplace and shifting organizational responsibilities and missions. The Centers for Disease Control is funding the development of a new planning tool for public health agencies and communities that combine community health with a more strategic planning approach. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation are funding 14 states and 41 local communities to conduct strategic planning through partnerships in a grant called, "Turning Point: Collaborating for a Century in Public Health."
- The development of improved health information systems will continue to facilitate more sophisticated health policy evaluation. This increased ability to conduct data-driven policy analysis will have substantial implications for both management and direction-setting functions in health care.
- Certificate of Need (CON) programs around the country are responding to changes in the marketplace and are becoming more flexible tools of public policy. CON responses to hospital conversions, the need for more long-term care options in communities and the development of alternatives to inpatient care are all witness to the ability of the program to adjust to environmental change.

Health planning as a discipline may have problems that we must identify and address, but the death of health planning is not one of them!