

Communicating

Better Health for One and All

Phillip L. Polakoff, MD, MEnvSc, MPH
Founder/CEO, A Healthier WE

Dennis Berens, MA
Chief Rural Strategist, A Healthier WE

June Sargent
Chief Impact Officer, A Healthier WE



Written By:

Phillip L. Polakoff MD MEnvSc MPH

Founder/CEO - A Healthier WE

Consulting Professor - Stanford University School of Medicine

Affiliated Scholar - Stanford University Bill Lane Center for the American West

Member - New England Journal of Medicine Catalyst Council

Dennis Berens MA

Chief Rural Strategist – A Healthier WE

Past Director Nebraska State Office of Rural Health,

Former President, National Rural Health Association & NOSORH

June Sargent

Chief Impact Officer – A Healthier WE

Acknowledgments:

Steve Raskin MD FACC

Chief Cardiology Advisor – A Healthier WE

Clinical Professor of Medicine Emeritus, University of California, San Francisco

John Langefeld MD

Chief Health Officer - A Healthier WE

Joe Evans PhD

Chief Behavioral Health Advisor - A Healthier WE

Professor, UNMC

David Angelson MMedSci PhD

Research Director - A Healthier WE

Vlad Chaloupka

Director of Photography - A Healthier WE

A Healthier WE - a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to addressing critical issues in rural health

Communicating *better Health for one and all*

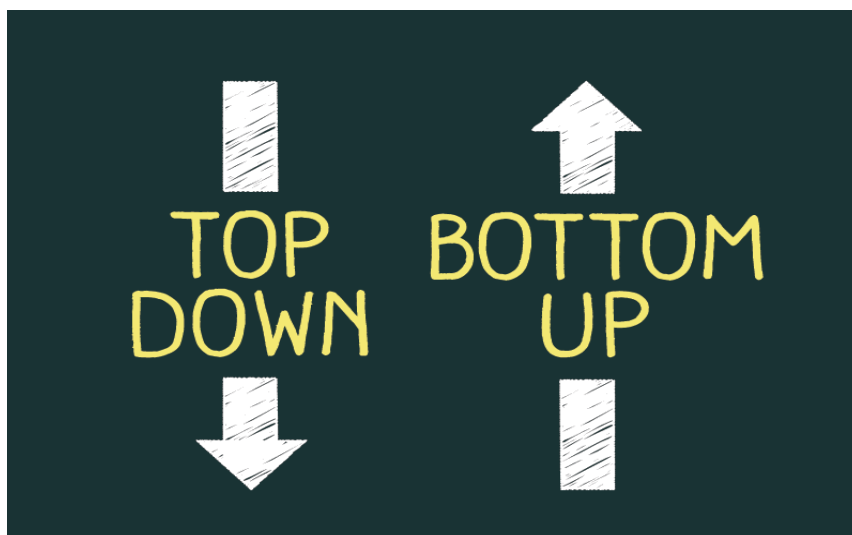
Health is when everything works in harmony. In much of America today, it's not working.

Too often we seem to focus on health care instead of health. As a result, it's hard to figure out how to address the underlying problem of health for the individual and the community.

It's time that communities talk about what's happening and how to change the negative trajectory before it becomes an overwhelming crisis.

The team at A Healthier WE suggests that we start with some basic definitions before we move on to basic ways to communicate with each other about how we can work together for better health

1. Health: when everything works in harmony.
2. Communication: the exchange of trusted information or the imparting of knowledge
3. Community: a group of like-minded individuals who have agreed to take a risk for each other to a certain degree.
4. Bottom up: an approach by a community to address common issues.
5. Top down: an approach by an entity outside the community that is working to address community issues.
6. Rural: a geographic and population identification that includes a set of values and lifestyle choices.
7. Urban: a geographic and population identification that includes a set of values and lifestyle choices.



If you accept the definition of health, above, then you will agree that wellness can come from inside and outside the community. Communities must determine whether they already have the necessary resources to come up with a plan and strategy to get to wellness or if they must look outside for assistance. Leadership must stay in touch with the community, always identifying the steps needed to be taken and informing the whole community of the efforts and the assistance that will be needed.

3. Change is a challenge for most of us. We value progress, but we often don't want to change to bring this about. Proposed changes require many opportunities for conversation and discussion – conversation that is not political but practical, conversation based on listening more than imparting an opinion, conversation that is based on sharing information and ideas that stem from shared values.
4. Identify community assets. Every community already has assets that may be used for better health. Help individuals find and use research that helps them to eat better, exercise better and build a family team that supports health. (Look up the Blue Zones Project -- <https://info.bluezonesproject.com/home> -- for some ideas.)

Once the leadership group has identified community values and goals, start the wider conversation, asking individuals where local assets for a healthier community are located and then channeling those assets to meet needs. Those assets may reduce both pain and costs. Discussions about health have focused far too long on cost rather than the savings that a healthier population and community can bring.

5. Sustainability is hard to focus on today. A leader for one challenge may not be the right leader for another challenge. Groups need to talk about the leadership values in the community and find individuals whose skills fit those needs. Also, understand that at a specific moment YOU may be the best person to take the lead to address an issue. Leaders must be people-oriented, communication-oriented and task oriented. People want to know what is going on and that their ideas will be listened to and considered. Leaders help everyone to track the process, the ups and the downs and the impact of actions taken. Then they need to encourage the identification and prioritization of the next issue to be addressed.
6. Utilize trusted local media, as well as, social media platforms to educate, inform and invite. Rural communities are now utilizing Facebook groups and Instagram accounts more than ever to communicate and learn about change. All with an eye toward understanding how their participation and influence can make a positive impact – locally and beyond. These group platforms are a place where locals feel connected and safe. They see other like-minded community members posting and commenting on a regular basis and it opens up a new type of dialogue that leads to better idea generation and more concrete problem-solving approaches. Other local group platforms are the local service clubs, local faith groups, and the local newspapers because they all influence what is happening in our communities.

7. If you have a clear-cut plan and goal, reached by the group and accepted by the community, you will be able to look at each step taken and see if it was successful or not. Keep good records so that you can examine the plan and see what worked and what didn't. Most importantly, you will be able to tell the story about how your community improved health and wellness.



These steps are not brand new. They have already been used successfully. But you must realize that it will be hard to think and do “bottom up” in a society that has been brought up on “top down” approaches in almost every aspect of life. The “bottom up” approach challenges each of us to use our individual and collective assets to improve the health of our individual selves and our community. Remember, health is when everything works, and it works better when *everyone* works to enable the move from illness to wellness.

*“In these times, if ‘I’ is replaced by ‘We’
even illness becomes wellness”*

Contact Information:

Phillip L. Polakoff, MD, MEnvSc, MPH
Founder/CEO A Healthier WE
plp@sbcglobal.net
510-508-9216

Dennis Berens, MA
Chief Rural Strategist A Healthier WE
dennis.berens123@gmail.com



A 501(c) 3 organization

www.healthierruralamerica.org