



## Misery Finds Collaborative Company: Addressing the Health Workforce Shortage through a Multidisciplinary Approach

### Executive Summary

- ▶ Like nursing, many health care professions are experiencing significant workforce shortages including social work, public health, pharmacy, medicine, science/research, and other allied health disciplines.
- ▶ Recruitment efforts from other disciplines can easily be viewed as a competitive threat, but one organization convened multidisciplinary leaders to address their common problems with a collaborative approach.

### Context for Collaboration

C-Change was well positioned to tackle this cancer workforce issue due to the very nature of its multi-sector and nonpartisan construction. Formerly known as the National Dialogue on Cancer, this 501(c)(3) organization comprises the top leaders from public, private, and nonprofit organizations concerned with cancer. The mission of C-Change is to leverage the expertise and resources of its membership to eliminate cancer as a public health problem at the earliest possible time. Practically speaking, the organization convenes multi-sector leaders to accelerate and focus the cancer agenda. Together, they are able to tackle issues that they cannot affect alone.



Alison P. Smith

**W**E WORK SIDE BY SIDE. We encourage teamwork, because we know that patients need the best that all disciplines have to offer. We are even held accountable to regulations that demand evidence of interdisciplinary practice. But, when it comes to solving our discipline-specific problems, we often work alone.

C-Change, a coalition of cancer organizations, has embarked on an initiative to promote all careers in cancer across the continuum of care. Their efforts serve as an example of how any institution or any community can cooperatively address a problem in a manner that has a broader reach and universal benefits. While the results of this organization's collaboration are numerous and ongoing, the development, content, and significance of the *Careers in Cancer* Speaker's Kit targeting high school and college students will be profiled here.

While the projects tackled by the committees (or Teams) of C-Change span aspects of research, prevention, access, and tobacco, this particular cross-cutting project focused on the cancer workforce. The Cancer Workforce Team has a longer-term goal of building a "National Cancer Corps" with the surge capacity to meet the needs of an aging and increasingly diverse population. One of several short-term projects falling under the umbrella of this goal aimed to develop a speaker's kit to promote careers in cancer. The kit was designed for use by any health professional with high school and college audiences as a tool to build awareness about the breadth and depth of careers in cancer.

Initially, the Cancer Workforce Team contemplated discipline-specific initiatives, but quickly came to appreciate the similarity of their problems and the overlap in their potential actions. The following statistics highlight both the magnitude of the supply issues facing the general and cancer health workforce as well as some of the demand issues reflecting the health and demographics of our population.

### Supply

- Nursing shortages are expected to reach 30% by 2020 in some areas of the country (NJSNA, 2002).
- Approximately 60% of oncologists and oncology nurses surveyed reported inadequate staffing (Buerhaus, 2001).
- The average age of a public health worker is 46.6 years; many public health agencies currently face a 20% vacancy rate.

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NOTE: For more information on the topic discussed in this column, the *Careers in Cancer* Speaker's Kit can be downloaded at [http://c-changetogether.org/about\\_ndc/ndc\\_teams/cancer\\_workforce\\_study\\_group.asp](http://c-changetogether.org/about_ndc/ndc_teams/cancer_workforce_study_group.asp)

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- The social work labor force is older than most professions and occupations, with nearly 30% of licensed social workers over 55 years of age.
- Imaging services demand is projected to increase by 140% over the next 20 years.

#### *Demand*

- Cancer is now the most common cause of death by disease claiming the lives of a half a million people per year.
- The lifetime probability of developing cancer is 1 in every 2 men and 1 in every 3 women.
- While cancer survival rates are improving, cancer incidence in an aging population is worsening.

As the statistics suggest, the current and projected workforce shortage in health disciplines is magnified in the sub-population of oncology-related workers. With this universal need defined, the opportunity to collaboratively raise awareness about career choices became clear.

#### **Creating the Message**

In this initial effort to inspire careers in cancer, the speaker's kit was designed to help students (a) appreciate the opportunity to make a difference in cancer, a major health problem; (b) consider the breadth and depth of career opportunities; and (c) gain the tools to pursue more information about potential education and career paths. The Team envisioned a speaker's kit that would be easy to use and that could be customized based upon the interests of the speaker and audience as well as factors determined by the presentation length and venue. Ultimately, the kit contained a slide presentation and other resource materials for the speaker and audience.

To create the desired flexibility, the presentation was designed in segments. Figure 1 outlines the flow of the presentation in terms of content and the motivational psychology imbedded in the words and images. The first portion of the presentation (sections 1-3) was designed to open the door to possible career paths. The latter portion of the presentation was designed to provide a more detailed profile of selected careers including personal quotes from cancer careerists and information on seven different disciplines: nurse, physician, social worker, public health scientist, research scientist, pharmacist, and cancer registrar. In most situations, speakers were advised to deliver the first portion of the presentation and provide the latter portion as a handout reference.

Ultimately, the team intended to freely disseminate the speaker's kit through its members and via their Web sites. By leveraging their respective networks, the message could be propagated exponentially. Along with the benefits of a massive network

**Figure 1.**  
**Content and Psychology**

<b>1. "What Do You Enjoy?" — Identification</b>
<i>The initial slides focus on identification through the use of:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual images of 15-25 year olds in street clothing.</li> <li>• Probing questions that might elicit an emotional response.</li> <li>• Messages suggesting "this could be you!"</li> </ul>
<b>2. "Consider the Problem" — Opportunity</b>
<i>This section of slides focuses on the significance of cancer through:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facts about the incidence of cancer and survival statistics.</li> <li>• Messages suggesting the scope of the problem.</li> <li>• An invitation to make a difference.</li> </ul>
<b>3. "Consider Your Options" — Choices</b>
<i>The last section of slides highlights practical considerations:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Earning potential, job security, career growth.</li> <li>• Variety of roles, work settings, and career paths.</li> </ul>
<b>4. "Consider a Career in Cancer" — Career Profiles</b>
<i>This supplemental section contains detailed profiles of seven health careers detailing:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits of the career.</li> <li>• Educational path.</li> <li>• Variety of roles and work settings.</li> </ul>

of messengers comes the risk of variability among messengers. For that reason, several talking points and tips (see Figure 2) were outlined. The messengers that the Team desired to enlist were accomplished leaders in cancer, many of whom were accustomed to delivering presentations to business and clinical audiences. Obviously, the communication techniques, language, and visual aides to reach adult professional audiences are quite different from those used to reach teen/student audiences.

In addition to a CD-Rom with the slide presentation and suggested talking points, the kit also contained a set of slide originals for use in making handouts, a supplemental handout listing Web sites with career-specific information, a suggested list of presentation venues, and a data collection postcard. The list of venues (see Figure 3) was included to help the messengers identify appropriate audiences within their existing networks and geography. The pre-addressed and stamped postcard was included to collect data on the number of presentations and audience members reached by the messengers.

While the expertise of the multidisciplinary leaders drove the goals and content of the project, communications and graphical expertise was necessary to craft the messages in way that they could be

**Figure 2.**  
**Talking Points and Tips for Speakers**

<p>❑ <b>Inspire:</b> Create emotional connections that will drive logical decisions and action.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasize the meaningful contribution of all cancer-related careers.</li> <li>• Share your personal story — education, career path, challenges/rewards.</li> </ul>
<p>❑ <b>Connect:</b> Interact with the audience throughout the presentation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who has considered a career in the health workforce? In cancer?</li> <li>• Who has a friend or family member with cancer?</li> </ul>
<p>❑ <b>Demystify:</b> Try to overcome their preconceived notions about cancer and careers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasize the opportunity, not the shortage.</li> <li>• Focus on job security, not vacancy rates.</li> <li>• Highlight the hope of survivorship.</li> <li>• Illustrate the varying lengths of educational preparation and amount of patient contact.</li> </ul>
<p>❑ <b>Assess:</b> Recognize their developmental and generational characteristics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for independence and choices.</li> <li>• Affinity for variety and flexibility.</li> <li>• Tolerance for challenge of career planning.</li> </ul>
<p>❑ <b>Teach:</b> Increase the chances of comprehension and retention.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid technical, scientific terminology, or jargon.</li> <li>• Repeat key points.</li> <li>• Limited amount of information and presentation length.</li> </ul>

most easily understood and be compelling. The Team members were quick to recognize the need to create age-appropriate and generation-specific messages. A communications consultant developed the messaging strategy for the first section of the presentation. Of critical importance was the recommendation to begin the presentation with an “emotional hook,” citing the human need to first evoke emotion before effecting a decision.

Several creative elements were employed to give energy to the presentation such as the use of the catch phrase “Be the generation that conquers cancer” and a picture of cycling champion and cancer survivor icon Lance Armstrong. In addition, the team contacted Andrea Higham, Johnson & Johnson’s Director of Corporate Equity and Nursing, who generously shared advice and experience from their “Discover Nursing” campaign (see *Nursing Economic\$*, July/August 2005, Leadership Roundtable for more details). Among many tips, Higham recommended the use of positive language such as “opportunity” and “job security” rather than “shortage.” Together, the communications and graphic design experts created a presentation with strong visual appeal and limited text with their teen audience in mind.

Ultimately, the speaker’s kit was delivered to the 150+ members and partners of C-Change in a “Call to Action.” In the spirit of their mission, “to leverage the expertise and resources of our membership,” leaders were specifically asked to:

1. Deliver the *Careers in Cancer* presentation at least three times by May 2006.
2. Post the presentation on their organization’s Web site or create a specific link to the Cancer Workforce Team page of the C-Change Web site.
3. Volunteer to serve on the speakers’ bureau for

**Figure 3.**  
**Suggested Venues**

Suggested venues for delivering <i>Careers in Cancer</i> presentation or making the speaker’s kit materials available.	
<p><b>Professional/Business Venues</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National association meetings — student tracks</li> <li>• Recruiters for health care organizations</li> <li>• State hospital associations</li> <li>• State medical/nursing/oncology societies</li> <li>• Local medical/nursing/oncology chapters</li> <li>• Trade associations</li> <li>• Career fairs/events</li> <li>• State labor agency</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community/Educational Venues</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High schools, colleges</li> <li>• Student associations</li> <li>• Parent teacher organizations/associations</li> <li>• College fairs</li> <li>• Guidance counselors</li> <li>• School boards</li> <li>• Youth groups — community service, faith based</li> <li>• Scouting troops</li> <li>• Survivor/family support groups</li> <li>• Cancer fundraising events</li> </ul>

*Careers in Cancer* presentations at the request of fellow C-Change members or stakeholders.

4. Disseminate these materials to their employees, members, and/or constituents to join in this "Call to Action."
5. Share the outcome of their presentations via the Data Collection Postcard.

In hopes to reach leaders beyond their membership, C-Change posted all of the materials on their Web site for easy downloading ([http://c-changetogether.org/about\\_ndc/ndc\\_teams/cancer\\_workforce\\_study\\_group.asp](http://c-changetogether.org/about_ndc/ndc_teams/cancer_workforce_study_group.asp))

### Reflecting on a Unique Achievement

As mentioned earlier, the multidisciplinary team of C-Change initially considered the challenges facing each professional group separately. The common need to bolster the quantity and quality of every discipline within the cancer workforce through recruitment, retention, and skill building efforts led the groups to join forces. The *Careers in Cancer* Speaker's Kit represents one short-term action to address the issue of recruitment.

When asked about the significance of this collaborative effort, several team members offered their perspective. Maureen Lichtveld, MD, MPH, chairs the Cancer Workforce Team of C-Change. Her past experience as a senior scientist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and her current role as professor and chair of the environmental policy at Tulane University's School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, has included many efforts to build the quality and quantity of the public health workforce. "Despite unprecedented advances in technology and a myriad of name transformations — from 'manpower shortages' to 'workforce demands' — the bottom-line in many sectors of care remains the same: too few professionals to care for an aging population. Building a National Cancer Corps is an exciting initiative underway at C-Change," remarked Lichtveld.

Regarding the uniqueness of this project, Lichtveld added, "It is a *first-ever* multidisciplinary effort to build the cancer workforce by breaking down the individual professional silos. It is sustainable. Clinically speaking, we took a causal approach

rather than a symptomatic approach to assuring care across the entire cancer care continuum — from prevention to survivorship. And, it is *unique*, creating partnerships across disciplines, employment sectors, and professional associations."

Representing the perspective of nurses on the Team, Pearl Moore, MN, RN, FAAN, chief executive officer of the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS), has been a dedicated member of C-Change. Moore remarked on the speaker's kit project, "ONS has been very concerned and focused on the nursing shortage and the impact on people with cancer. However, involvement with the C-Change Workforce Team has raised our awareness of the significant shortages and issues facing our fellow health care team members. We all recognize the value of the *entire* health care team to the patient, so collaborating to build the *entire* team benefits each of us and ultimately improves overall cancer care." Exemplifying the spirit of collaboration, Moore was quick to share the materials developed by C-Change with the ONS

membership and encouraged them to be part of the network of leaders promoting all careers in cancer.

### Moving Forward

As discussed, the *Careers in Cancer* Speaker's Kit is one of many uniquely collaborative initiatives being tackled by C-Change to address the multidisciplinary workforce shortages affecting the care of patients with cancer. Like many professional organizations and health care institutions, C-Change appreciates the chal-

lenge of balancing quick action with long-term impact. Building and sustaining the pipeline for the health workforce will likely require substantive changes in policy and funding coupled with a multitude of creative programs like this...all fueled by collaboration.\$

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