



Team Science Spotlight

Dr. Catherine Demko

Associate Professor, School of Dental Medicine

Stakeholder Engagement in Practice: Researchers and Community Partners Working Together to Build Equal Partnership in Addressing Gaps in Healthcare

Dr. Catherine Demko discovered early in her career at the School of Dental Medicine, that one of the best ways to generate evidenced-based best practices was to produce the evidence directly from practice - thus igniting her commitment to practice-based research with engaged clinical and community stakeholders. Dr. Demko attributes the origin of her experience with practice-based research to the Department of Family Medicine, under the mentorship of Dr. Kurt Stange. There she learned that the key to engaging community stakeholders as investigative partners is developing relationships and identifying the mutual benefit for partnership, both of which require additional attention and commitment on the part of investigators. Partners need to fully understand and believe that research investigators desire to establish an honest partnership with a transparent research agenda which will be carried out for mutual benefit. Establishing trust is essential and takes time, potentially requiring multiple meetings to gain a true understanding between the university and the community partner. Any breach in that trust hurts not only the research in question, but reflects poorly on the University as a whole. Furthermore, it is important that community partners have a clear contact person and open communication with research personnel from the University in case they have questions, need to report a problem or would like to share a new idea.

Dr. Demko currently serves as the Co-Director of Interprofessional Education Evaluation. Along with Principal Investigator Dr. Ellen Leubbers and colleagues from the Schools of Medicine, Dental Medicine and the Mandel School for Applied Social Sciences, Dr. Demko works with community organizations as part of the Interprofessional Learning and Exchange Project (ILEAP) which places teams of interprofessional (IP) students in clinical and community organizations to enhance student learning and add value to the site. This model of IP education is being studied to determine if it is effective in addressing gaps in patient care that have been identified in conjunction with the community partner while enhancing student team skills.

Recently, members of the ILEAP faculty team joined community partners from Neighborhood Family Practice, to participate in a Collaborative Working Retreat awarded by the Clinical and Translational Science Collaborative. One of the byproducts of the retreat was the desire to bring in additional stakeholders in the form of new community organizations. To that end, Dr. Demko and the team held a community forum in the fall of 2019 entitled "Teams Learning Care in the Community (TLC²)". Attended by 55 participants from 24 community organizations, the forum

provided the opportunity for the ILEAP team to share about the successful partnerships between student IPE teams and the community organizations in which they served. Throughout the program, members of the ILEAP investigative team were able to engage with existing community partners as well as new potential partners. Dr. Demko credits these in person conversations as the reason that several of the new community organizations in attendance have reached out hoping to become engaged with the ILEAP program.