



One hundred eighteen (118) participants from 11 states across the U.S. (Alaska, Connecticut, DC, Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, and Vermont) participated in the Synthesis, Engagement and Elevation to Eliminate Disparities (SEED) Symposium held on June 11-12, 2015. Participants included academic researchers and professors, health policy makers, community leaders, administrators, physicians, caregivers, and high school, undergraduate and graduate students. Sponsored by the UMass Center for Health Equity Intervention Research (CHEIR), the

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intended outcomes of the symposium were to:

- Identify synergy among health equity researchers in order to elevate the elimination of health disparities;
- Enhance professional development of health equity research researchers – faculty, students and community; and
- Disseminate findings within the community, academia and other networks.

The two day national symposium moved beyond traditional academic approaches, in which information is shared with little emphasis on discussion and synthesis, and achieved outcomes through innovative activities that redefined common challenges and inspired new ways of eliminating health disparities. Instead of oral presentations, five health equity researchers and advocates gave **SEED Talks**, a presentation style modeled after Technology, Entertainment, and Design (TED) Conferences that integrates inspiring stories with the science and practice of health equity research. **SEED-tainment** uplifted participants using dance, spoken word, theater and music, which demonstrated the arts and its deep connection to work in health equity. Instead of poster sessions, the SEED Symposium convened the **SEED Collection**, a gathering area where participants were encouraged to experience the power of storytelling through a photo booth, graffiti walls with provocative questions, and four interactive booths.

The SEED Symposium commenced on Thursday, June 11, 2015 with Flamenco Worcester, a group of flamenco aficionados, students and performers in Central Massachusetts. Dr. Milagros Rosal, CHEIR Co-Principal Investigator, Chancellor Michael Collins, MD, FACP and Dr. Jeroan Allison, CHEIR Principal Investigator provided welcoming remarks. As the moderator, Dr. Marc Nivet, Chief Diversity Officer of Association of American Medical Colleges, provided additional opening remarks and challenged attendees to use the symposium to leverage the thinking of others, elevate the discourse and our ability to think differently than we would have to achieve our goals.

Dr. Camara Jones, Research Director at National Center for Chronic Disease, Prevention and Health Promotion (NCCDPHP) and President of the American Public Health Association launched the symposium with a dynamic key SEED Talk. She engaged the audience through storytelling and the use of allegories to depict how health disparities arise, the impact of racism, how privilege works and moving to action to address racism.

After the key SEED Talk, participants gathered in the SEED Collections to interact with four stations: Community Engagement, Research Literacy, Training the Next Generation, Storytelling as an Intervention Tool. They were also invited to memorialize why they cared about health equity at the Photo Booth. Simultaneously, participants enjoyed SEED-tainment, including the Seven Hills Symphony,

Lani Peterson, The Worcester Washington AIDS International Teens and Belmont AME Zion Church Liturgical Dance.

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Day 2 of the SEED Symposium began with Flamenco Worcester. Throughout the day there were five SEED Talks and several performers:

- Dr. Kimberley Lopez, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics-Retrovirology and Global Health at Baylor College of Medicine introduced her experiences in “listening and leaning into the discomfort”.
- Brian “Voice Porter” Hawkins, a visual and performance artist, emphasized that “numbers are not parallel to struggle” and talked about his experience of working directly with community members to create better self and environmental spaces.
- Dennis G. Heaphy, Healthcare Analyst and an advocate for people with disabilities shared how after a life-altering injury, he no longer was a majority in the healthcare system, but an overlooked category. “No longer one of us, but one of them” he stated. He went on to share the start of his advocacy for the rights of people with disabilities.
- Dr. Na’Taki Osborne Jelks’, an environmental health scientist and social change engineer, started with the origin of her curiosity for seeking environmental justice and her process to engage community members in fixing environmental health problems.
- Dr. Jan Yost, President of Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts presented the principles of the Empowerment Evaluation model and explored how evidence-based strategies can create systems change and sustain the work of the community beyond the grant-making cycle.
- Martha Convers kept everyone energized during the break with her Zumba movements.
- Spoken word artist, Obeji Janice, gave an exciting “one woman show” on her experience of identifying with an ethnic background and recognizing cultural difference.

Using two approaches, Open Space and Panel of Possibilities, the SEED Symposium also created time and space during Day 2 to support participants in reflecting on the ideas and experiences shared; dialoguing about passions and concerns; and identifying possible action steps as a collective and individuals.

In the morning, **Open Space** allowed participants to set the agenda and identify issues or opportunities related to the theme of Upstream Strategies to Eliminate Health Disparities. The group consolidated 14 issues into five agreed-upon topics – Supports to help move to self-sufficiency, Men’s Health, Honoring inclusion, Community engagement to eliminate health disparities and How do we change our educational constructs?

The last gathering of the SEED Symposium was the **Panel of Possibilities**, which guided participants in a visioning exercise to address the question, “imagine that we have eliminated health disparities, what work would have to be attended to in order to accomplish this?” Panelists for the Panel of Possibilities included: Georgia Simpson May, MS, Director at Massachusetts Department of Public Health Office of

Health Equity; Matilde Castiel, MD, Executive Director of Latin American Health Alliance and Associate Professor Internal Medicine, Family and Community Medicine and Psychiatry at UMMS; Marc Nivet, EdD, MBA, Chief Diversity Officer at Association of American Medical Colleges; Camara Jones, MD, MPH, PhD, Research Director and the National Center for Chronic Disease, Prevention and Health Promotion (NCCDPHP) and President of the American Public Health Association; and Tawara D. Goode, MA, Assistant Professor and Director at the National Center for Cultural Competence & Associate Director, University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, Center for Child and Human Development, Georgetown University Medical Center, Department of Pediatrics.

The 2015 SEED Symposium ended with participants providing statements of insights based on the activities throughout Day 1 and Day 2. Insights given by participants focused on strategies to eliminate health disparities, inspiring words and knowledge on concepts related to the theme of the symposium.

- Recognizing and rectifying historical injustices
- Devise a global healthcare education system that includes comprehensive training for all providers to gain intercultural competence and the ability to recognize embedded structural systems and the resources to dismantle them.
- Be uncomfortable and be different.
- Turn collective wisdom into collective impact.
- Learn how to ask better questions.
- Racism is often passive and we have to first, name racism when we see it; second, ask how racism is operating here; and third, organize and strategize to act. Working together we can dismantle racism and the structure, policies, and practices that are the mechanisms that keep racism in place.
- Community engagement is the key to eliminating disparities.
- Imagine it and then create it.

For more information and to share your thoughts:

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