

Implementing a Health Cabinet

Definition: A group that promotes Health Ministry in and beyond a faith community. It knows the present activities, resources, gifts and needs of the community.

Common Elements of health cabinets:

- Meet regularly
- Aware of happenings in church and community in health ministry
- Know strengths of congregation and what motivates members
- Aware of unmet needs in congregation
- Encourages other individuals and groups to meet those needs
- Addresses needs through education, support groups, pastoral care, health fairs, recreational activities, outreach and referral, etc.

What to do:

Step 1: Get Ready

- Inform yourself—read books, search the internet, review denominational material
- Talk with individuals, other churches, and agencies – learn about their experiences
- Talk with leaders within your faith community. What do they understand about health ministry? Are they in favor of it?
 - Discuss how the Health Cabinet can affect the congregation
 - Their role/collaboration with the Cabinet
 - Their place in the organizational structure
- Determine the steps to start a program
 - Does the church's understand the need for a Health Cabinet—Biblical mandate, social justice issue, pastoral care issue, mandate of the denomination
 - Does the Church understand the intention, need, and process for beginning health ministry – get input

Step 2: Lay the Foundation—form a task force

- Recruit a diverse group
 - Get a representative of the church
 - Get a balance of health care professionals and laity
- Select leadership
 - A coordinator to spearhead the group
 - A secretary to record actions, suggestions, discussion

Step 3: Assessment

- What is the mission of your church? To what is your church being called to do in your community at the present time?
- What are your present activities?
- What experience or expertise do you have in the congregation?

- What resource materials do you have?
- What are the health agencies in your community at large? What community service are they doing?
- What impact do these resources make?
- What elements of your health ministry give you satisfaction?
- What would you like to see improved?
- Do you want to focus only on your faith community or do you want to provide outreach? (Some health ministries focus strictly on outreach.)
- What are the strengths of your faith community? What does it particularly do well? Socializing? Including a diverse group of people? Crisis intervention? Education?
- How do ministries succeed in your faith community? How do they overcome obstacles?
- How can you get the congregation to support different ministries? What needs are not met?
- What have your surveys told you about your faith community, its needs, and its resources?

Step 4: Form the Health Cabinet

- Create a structure similar to that of the task force
- Establish a size – committees can be small if there is strong participation, more than 12 becomes ineffective
- Establish lines of communication between the cabinet, other committees and staff
- Have the parish nurse serve as one of the members – not the leader
- Make connections between the essential members in the community
- Write a Mission Statement that relates to church's mission and vision
- Write Objectives that are realistic and specific and consider:
 - The available resources
 - The needs of congregation and surrounding area
 - Ways ideas succeed in your faith community
 - Potential obstacles and how to deal with them
 - Ways to network with other faith communities and health agencies

Step 5: Raise Visibility

- Utilize events to promote the program/mission
- Provide brochures and other written information to educate others

Step 6: Idea to Mission

- Transition the group from a task force to a working health cabinet
- Review the findings of the task force and make necessary alterations as the cabinet is formed
- Select diverse health cabinet members according to interest, experience, and expertise

Step 7: The Health Cabinet

- Set up its structure
 - Leadership
 - Meeting schedule
 - Focus
- Review the mission statement, goals and objectives

Step 8: Annually Reevaluate the Health Ministry

- What is it doing?
- What isn't it doing that maybe it could be doing?
- What needs to be altered?
- What are your dreams for the future?
- Have a yearly celebration.

Adapted from Health and Wellness: What Your Faith Community Can Do, Jill Westberg McNamara, Pilgrim Press, 2006.