



David Patrick

An Interview with David Patrick: Academic-to-Academic Collaboration

Interviewed By Jack Thompson

David Patrick's career crosses many boundaries. He is an infectious disease physician and epidemiologist, and until recently was Director of Epidemiology Services at the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control. He was recently appointed to the position of Director of the School of Population and Public Health at the University of British Columbia (UBC), and was one of the founders of the annual Cross Border Symposium, which since 2005 has brought together researchers from UBC, the University of Washington, and Simon Fraser University.

Dr. Patrick helped organize a 2004 cross-border tracking workshop, "Emerging public health threats: Tracking infectious disease across borders," which brought together public health people from six states and three provinces.

He has published on such topics as histoplasmosis in travelers and the impact of imported European infectious diseases on aboriginal health. His interest is in fostering interdisciplinary approaches to control infectious diseases in populations. He recently sat down with Jack Thompson of the Northwest Center for Public Health Practice, another co-founder of the Symposium, to discuss academic collaboration across the border.

Author

Jack Thompson, MSW, is the former director of the Northwest Center for Public Health Practice at the University of Washington. Mr. Thompson is a Principal Lecturer in Department of Health Services and has been on faculty in the School of Public Health since 1994

How have you seen the partnerships develop among the schools over the past seven years?

The interesting progression has been how people on either side of the border originally got together to discuss shared issues in public health practice. It's refreshing to see that same cross-pollination now involving academic public health researchers.

How have the issues changed over this time?

I think our discipline of public health needs to be conscious of succumbing to a "flavor of the day" approach, while staying true to its longer-term goals. On the surface, we've swung through discussions around bioterrorism, Olympic preparedness, harm reduction, and pandemic. But underneath, there has been a steady current of focus on population health, prevention strategies, and the fascinating natural experiment in health care delivery that we can observe between the State of Washington and the Province of British Columbia.

What inter-school collaborations are currently in play?

I think we should first take our hats off to the long-term collaborations in the area of environmental and occupational health, which preceded our meeting by many years. We've seen faculty swap curriculum ideas and materials. We recently had a great north-south collaboration to look at adverse events from the different pandemic vaccines used on either side of the 49th parallel.

Should there be a larger role for students and the practice community?

The most stimulating parts of the meetings involve students presenting on their projects. I think this needs to grow and I would especially like to see more of our students in thesis-based programs share their work with us at future meetings. As for practice, it was there in the beginning, is now, and hopefully ever shall be a big part of the meeting. Next year, I'd like to work to get clinical faculty and others in practice attending in higher numbers.

How should this annual symposium develop in the future?

As we grow, it's going to be important to make sure that we have rich content for people with an interest in any of a number of themes within public health. In addition to maintaining strong plenary sessions across the full field of interest, we should be considering more concurrent sessions in areas such as global health, health services, social and life course determinants of health, and other areas. ■