Connected communities

Recipes for collaborative practice improvement and community development for health

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Promoting Health Across Boundaries www.PHAB.us

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Introduction

Experienced cooks often work without a recipe – creating charming culinary concoctions from their experience and intuition. Success requires repeated tastings – it is an active process with multiple feedback loops. Less experienced cooks try to copy the masters' creations by using recipes. In time, these novices gain enough experience and skill to trust their own abilities to taste the food and adapt these recipes to 'make them their own'.

Four papers in this issue of *London Journal of Primary Care* provide recipes for integrated models of working together that can be locally adapted. They provide us with models to: uncover the strengths (assets) within communities for sustainable development,¹ use routinely collected data to reveal the effect of locally led health improvement,² stimulate collaborative working between general practices and others to solve complex health and social needs,³ and engage diverse organisations to move care from hospital to community.⁴

Together, these papers present a cookbook of recipes for integrated care – showing how generalist and specialist healthcare practitioners, social care and public health can enhance each other's abilities to produce healthy people and healthy populations. The papers show how even novices can facilitate complex inter-organisational collaborations by using established recipes, and who will in time become experts at creating their own.

We describe the (dry and liquid) ingredients that the authors use – the large number alone shows how deceptively complex integrated care can be. Then, we

continue the cooking metaphor to compare integrated care with baking bread – melding multiple ingredients from different sources to create beautifully tasting meals that are more than the sum of the parts.

Ingredients

Identify and gather together from your kitchen (and borrow from your neighbours if needed) as many of the ingredients as you can from those listed in Box 1.

Instructions

Preheat the oven to hot.

Bring together chefs with complementary knowledge of promoting the health of people, populations and community.

Get advice from hungry people.

Separately, each chef should mix, in separate bowls large enough to allow thorough blending, but small enough to bring ingredients close together:

DRY INGREDIENTS that relate to the health of people, communities and populations. The mix should include data – both statistics and stories – to inform and monitor evolving hypotheses and changes in processes and outcomes. The inclusion of both numbers and narratives provides the gluten that creates the needed

Box 1 Ingredients**Dry**

- Healthcare quality data
- Routinely collected healthcare and public health data
- Population, community and subgroup health data
- Publicly reported data
- Amalgamated data from varied sources
- General practitioners
- Practice nurses
- Practice managers and administrative teams
- Community matrons, dietetics, other healthcare professionals
- Public health professionals
- Local social service professionals
- Voluntary groups
- Clinical commissioning groups and councils
- Healthcare practices
- Public health agencies
- Social agencies
- University partners
- Patient and public interest groups
- Innovation fund
- Regular reports
- Quality improvement initiatives
- Community health programmes
- Social service programmes
- Self-help programmes
- Patient self-management programmes
- Disease-specific programmes
- Health promotion programmes
- Initiatives on the social and environmental determinants of health
- Shared geographic space
- Networks small enough to produce a sense of belonging and large enough to have political influence

Liquid

- Information on contextual influences
- Consideration of, and building on, motivations
- Strategic needs assessment
- Assessment of assets
- Numbers and narratives on clusters of interest
- Regular transdisciplinary meetings
- Shared interpretation of data
- Facilitation
- Regular forums for sharing information
- Mobilisation of capacities and collaboration
- Boundary spanning initiatives, teams and culture
- Health and Wellbeing Boards
- Clusters of 10–20 practices serving ~ 50 000 people
- Shared space for collaboration between public health and primary care
- Role modelling, ground rules and repeated reminders to use data in developmental and empowering ways
- Community empowerment
- Long-term partnerships
- Monthly workshops that build trust and span boundaries
- Mix of 'top down' and 'bottom up'
- Balance of vertical and horizontal integration
- Linking planning and action to the annual commissioning (and other) cycle(s)
- Multidisciplinary shared leadership teams
- Experience-based co-design
- Whole system events
- Political space to bring together multiple perspectives to draw implications and plans from data
- Multimethod, participatory action research
- Learning organisations

bonds in the next step. Beware, mixing dry ingredients can cause coughing as the elements aerosolise and irritate the nares; this is normal and worth the annoyance, and makes the subsequent aroma all the more satisfying.

LIQUID INGREDIENTS that include a mix of communication forums that allow multiple hypotheses to be developed as shared learning emerges. These forums foment new bonds that provide leavening and lubrication.

Combine the dry and liquid ingredients to create a dough that blends democratic processes with strategic influence.

Allow dough to rise.

After a short time, the dough will need to be punched down, but do not worry. Many people will line up to poke holes and punch down the doughs, which seem to inexplicably rise from the sticky mush.

Separately, place each dough mound close together onto a single baking sheet.

Bake at a high temperature until the personal, community and population doughs have merged together to create a unified whole. This transformational event will be interpreted as a new entity that includes but transcends each part, creating trepidation at the loss, and joy at the wholeness. The balance of bliss and fear will vary for different people at different times.

Turn down the temperature but continue baking to foster further consolidation.

Bring the result into the kitchen for everyone to see.

Serve while still warm. Feed the hungry first. Some of those who are not hungry will become so from the aroma and visual appeal, and from watching the hungry have their fill. Make sure the chefs savour both the enjoyment of those around them and their recollection of the process, liberally sharing credit with those who produced, brought and gave up the original components.

Among those dining, more ingredients, both dry and liquid will appear. This will be interpreted by some as a divine miracle, by others as a miracle of the group process. In both interpretations, a sense of abundance is created from shortage. (We are indebted to Will Miller, as well as personal experience, for the ideas about abundance emerging from shared shortage and group process.)

In the serving, eating and critiquing, new chefs, sous-chefs, farmers and distributors will appear. Welcome them.

The science of working with multiple ingredients

As with cooking, collaborative working allows new forms to emerge – it is a creative process.⁵ You can adapt models of working to the local context – the ingredients you have and the preferences of local people. There is science to be learned about how to work with multiple ingredients and a truth to be learned that individual ingredients can become enriched when they give up some of their separateness to become part of a larger whole.⁶

Integrated working has been known by different names, such as community-oriented primary care,^{7–9} asset-based community development,¹⁰ combined horizontal and vertical integration,^{11–13} narrative unity, salutogenesis,^{14,15} shared meaning or understanding,¹⁶ social network,^{17,18} community empowerment,¹⁹ social return on investment,²⁰ whole-systems participatory action research^{6,21} or large-scale service transformation.²²

But in all of them you will find one eternal truth – the secret is to taste it.

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