



Barbara Stagers, MD - Physicians as Social Advocates

Dr. Barbara Stagers is currently the Director of Adolescent Medicine at Children’s Hospital in Oakland, California. She is also the Director of the Health Professions Internship Partnership - a multi-level mentoring program for disadvantaged high school-aged youth, and ethnically diverse medical students, interns, and residents in the Oakland and East Bay area. Barbara spends two days in the clinic at Children’s Hospital and three days a week in the community.

EARLY INFLUENCES- The Power of Family

Barbara’s early influences clearly came from her father, Dr. Frank Stagers, active leader and Immediate Past President of CMA. Since early childhood, she has been exposed to community-based medicine through her father’s work. Her father taught her that physicians could be social advocates — he was and has been a role model all her life. Barbara’s biggest decision was deciding in what role, through which career path she wanted to serve the community, her community. In her 20’s, she chose medicine and to become a doctor, eventually an adolescent physician. Adolescent medicine attracted her because it takes a family health and holistic view of health and reimbursement systems acknowledge the interrelationship of prevention, education, social services, to adolescent health and promotes the development of integrated services. It is an area of medicine that encouraged her to continue to be involved in her community. Beginning in the early years of her career she gravitated to positions that encouraged her to be involved in community meetings about adolescent health, be visible in school discussions and community health coalitions. She noticed immediately that she was often the only physician involved in these community forums -- “*Where are my colleagues?*” she often wondered. She began observing that communities were beginning to do a lot of their own community health planning and many health service sectors were participating - but not the private medical community. During the years of healing children, many of whom spent a lot of time in hospitals, she found that some were very attracted to the medical field, but felt the lack of support and encouragement to pursue such an ambitious academic and life path. Barbara began to put two and two together.

GETTING STARTED IN COMMUNITY BASED PROJECTS - A Story Of Motivation, Inspiration, Determination And Creativity

Barbara has been working with her colleagues in a number of ways to promote the involvement of physicians in community-based work. She sees physicians, be they physicians working in private practice, managed care organizations, or primary care clinics, as very important partners in the larger public health system in each community. By being involved, knowing what is happening at your local schools related to health issues, and understanding the resources and assets of other health and health-related organizations and providers - physicians will not only be better at providing good information to their patients, they will be enhancing the community’s well-being by contributing as a partner.

Adolescents are Barbara’s special interest. She has always been aware of the lack of community-oriented physicians and in her work as a physician also aware of so many high school students struggling to find themselves – and some of them to find themselves in medicine. She thought back about what made her life path so possible for her and her father’s influence as a role model and mentor was a major factor. She thought, “*Kids from the community could be mentored, too. If they were, they could become major contributors to their families and communities as physicians and community leaders engaged in community health issues.*” And so she embarked on a journey to establish her vision – the formation of the Health Professions Internship Partnership [HPIP], which has grown to include 30 high school students from 4 schools (in its first year) as mentees; and 180 college students, 40 medical school students, 28 residents, and six attending physicians interested in being mentors. She has developed a mentoring pipeline targeted especially to kids representing the spectrum of ethnic cultures in California.

VALUES, BELIEFS AND DEFINITIONS OF HEALTH AND MEDICINE -- “You have to love people and love life.”

All her life, Barbara has been exposed to community-based medicine through her father’s work. She learned very early on that physicians could be social advocates. By working in the community herself, it has reaffirmed what she has always believed, that physicians are true health providers in the community. She clearly identifies herself as a community-based physician. There is truly an art and science to medicine; and she believes in and practices both. Her work in the community has reaffirmed what she knows to be true – that people are connected to networks and to communities – they are not isolated – and their health is connected. Her own work has validated and reaffirmed her belief system and kept her “real”. She does not believe, as she feels some physicians do, that being an MD is tantamount to being a medical deity. This, she feels is a problem in medicine and that many physicians focus on the science of medicine exclusively. In fact, the problem is getting worse and not better: physicians are getting less and less contact time with each patient; they are losing the importance of this relationship, contact and the art of medicine. Physicians have been pushed further these past decades into materialistic goals rather than humanistic goals. She fervently believes that you have to love what you are doing every day. You have to love people and love life to be a “complete” physician.

ENCOURAGING PHYSICIANS TO BE INVOLVED IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

One of the greatest obstacles Barbara feels to physicians being more involved in community work is that this type of work is not validated or valued by their peers or by society. There are not enough positives in medicine right now. It is a problem for physicians and those in training. She strongly recommends that physicians get involved in communities – in a community. It will turn out to be a source of support, trust and respect. The community can truly become your advocate. She encourages physicians to work toward a broader vision of community health. It will reaffirm your values and your reason for becoming a physician.