Dueling Ethical Constructs: another barrier to synergistic public/private partnerships in public health

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Introduction

Partnerships between the private sector and the public sector offer the promise of being able to harness the strengths inherent in each sector in serving public health objectives. Yet, these promised partnerships often fail to materialize, or fail to achieve the desired complementary effect from partnering. The specific aim of this research is to gain an understanding of leaders’ thinking regarding existing relationships and systems, barriers and opportunities related to public/private partnerships in public health in Connecticut.

Results

An ethical dimension was present in the responses of both public and private actors when giving their opinion about various aspects of public/private partnerships. “Ethics” herein is used with its common definition of principles that guide decision making and/or behavior. The theme of ethics co-occurred 56 times among the 210 coded passages within the interview transcripts. Importantly, these ethical dimensions expressed by key informants were consistent within group and had important distinctions between groups. There were 32 ethical codes within the “private” grouping of informants and 31 within the “public” grouping of informants, with 7 ethical codes counted among both groups due to the dual affiliation of a single informant.

Conclusions

Theme coding revealed that between public and private actors there exists a gap in understanding of the disparate sectors’ operational ethical frameworks. The lack of common principles or ethics in establishing cross-sector partnerships may be a key barrier to achieving the promised synergies in achieving local and national public health objectives.

Decision makers need to be aware of the incongruence in ethics between public and private actors in the public health setting and be prepared to address these issues during the partnering process.

Sources


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- Connecticut Children’s Medical Center
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