

ANETTE BIRCK

Successful Health Innovation Partnership Based on Unique Model of Collaboration

How do you create synergy in a health innovation partnership involving three universities, a university college and two public health institutions? Copenhagen Health Innovation has striven to answer this question since 2016, and experience shows that local rooting is necessary if the broad collaboration is to succeed.

Increased life expectancy and more patients with chronic and multiple diseases are solid challenges facing the healthcare sector in the years to come. The technological and medical development increases the demand for more, better and more effective healthcare services. If we are to prepare future health professionals for a constantly changing healthcare sector, we must put together coherent and progressive study programmes that provide the students with innovation competences and experience with translating professional knowledge into new ideas and solutions based on real-life social challenges.

We Must Create a Closer Connection between Education and Practice

This goal was the reason why four large Copenhagen-based educational institutions and two of the main healthcare providers in Denmark in 2016 decided to work together on finding a new approach to equip students with the competences needed in the future. The six organisations established a strategic partnership, Copenhagen Health Innovation (CHI), as a unifying organisation facilitating closer collaboration between

management, teachers, students and health professionals as partners.

One of CHI's main focusses is to create a closer connection between healthcare practice and study programmes. This is done by identifying health challenges from practice in the City of Copenhagen and the Capital Region of Denmark and integrating these into the teaching of both health professional, technological and business-oriented study programmes. Working with concrete challenges from the healthcare sector gives the students a chance to test their professional knowledge on real-life problems and to develop an open and innovative mindset preparing them for the dynamic demand for competences of the future labour market.

Local Rooting Facilitates Internal Value Creation

In order to support this effort and to develop a joint collaboration culture, a special working group was established, in addition to the independent central organisation, and tasked with developing and running the initiative. The group includes one dedicated member of staff from each of the six partner organisations. These innovation consultants are funded by the joint scheme, ►



but employed by the individual partners. They meet regularly for development meetings, their shared goal to striving to integrate health challenges into teaching. The balance between local rooting and joint strategic development creates certain benefits in the work of the consultants and their approach to the task.

'Local rooting is important to the educational institutions. In order for the project to succeed, we need to establish good connections with teachers. It is not just a question of connecting things. Facilitating collaboration with practice requires an understanding of the reality facing the teachers and the courses', says Werner Sperschneider and Nina Riis, innovation consultants at University College Copenhagen and the University of Copenhagen, respectively. They both help teachers implement challenges and adjust their teaching in order for it to support the innovation process the students undergo in the attempt to find ideas and solutions to a given challenge and to make sure that it prepares the students for working with practice.

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Rooting is just as important in the Capital Region of Denmark, which is responsible for the public hospitals.

'There is no doubt that it would have been more difficult for me to contact the hospital departments if I had not been employed by the Capital Region. You must know the value of both output and collaboration and respect and understand the everyday life and core tasks of the health professionals before you can

establish a successful collaboration with clinical practice', says Nina Brocks from the Capital Region of Denmark.

Unique Approach to Health Innovation

Nina Brocks compiles challenges and, together with the other consultants, makes sure that they are implemented in relevant study programmes so both the unit behind the challenge, the teacher and the students get the most out of the collaboration.

'This approach to working with health innovation is unique, and it is important to make sure that the different collaborators understand the opportunities and limitations – from what it requires to collaborate with the healthcare sector to what can realistically be expected of the students', Nina Brocks stresses.

For example, the developers of a new children's hospital in Copenhagen, BørneRiget, needed new ideas for the design of the future children's hospital. This challenge was matched with a strategy and design course at the Technical University of Denmark. The students spent an entire day at existing children's wards collecting empirical data. Subsequently they developed design concepts, which had to focus on the value of the

idea for the child, its parents and the organisation as a whole. BørneRiget received many ideas with inspiration for their future development, and the students gained unique experience developing something that had to fit into a complex organisation.

This match was possible only because the innovation consultants are deeply rooted in their organisations and have the overview necessary to match the right parties.

Balance Reaching Joint Goals

Just because local rooting is a prerequisite for establishing a joint development initiative does not mean that it is easy. The individual partner organisations interpret the cross-sectorial collaboration differently, and this created problems during the start-up phase, as the group members had very different expectations, focusses and interests.

'Especially during the start-up phase we had very different focusses with regard to the outputs of the project. Practice has a natural focus on solving health challenges, while the educational partners focus more on educational goals and study programmes. This has made it difficult to work in the same direction on a shared goal', says Nina Brocks from the Capital Region of Denmark.

However, it is obvious that this kind of collaboration and cultural understanding across sectors takes time and dialogue. Here the innovation consultants play a main role in facilitating collaboration between teachers and health professionals, creating good matches and ensuring that the given health challenge is adjusted to the teaching. In other words, it is important to ensure equality in the group of consultants and to coordinate the resource consumption, as this creates a basis for long-term collaborations of value to all parties.

Culture Development through Co-Creation from Various Starting Points

The challenges experienced during the start-up phase were expected, and gradually the innovation consultants have gotten to know each other and the organisations. In this way, Copenhagen Health Innovation is not just a collaboration; it is a culture development project. The six partners are very different and have different perspectives on innovation and on working with innovation. However, the tension field between the partners also reveals the true potential of the collaboration. When the innovation consultants join the students in practice and see the solutions created, the value of their great efforts becomes visible.

'It is great to watch the students face practice – when they surprise us by asking questions that we did not expect, or when they challenge practice, and practice loves it. Watching the interplay that emerges when the students and practice really commit to the collaboration is incredibly rewarding', says Nina Riis from the University of Copenhagen.

The Value of the Collaboration

So far, more than 400 students from the four educa-



tional institutions have worked on more than 100 challenges from the healthcare sector. The results are impressive:

University College Copenhagen first used health challenges in a single 10-week cross-disciplinary course. According to the head of studies, this caused a quantum leap in learning and increased commitment among the students. Therefore, the approach has now been expanded to several cross-disciplinary courses offered each semester.

The University of Copenhagen ran an intensive four-day pilot course for 12 students of dentistry, who had to solve a challenge facing care dental treatment in the City of Copenhagen. This process was also such a success that the head of studies expects to repeat the course next year, this time for 200 students.

The healthcare sector also considers the collaboration with the students a success. It has provided them with new perspectives on various challenges, and in some cases it has even been possible to let the students continue to work with their ideas within the scope of a bachelor or master's thesis project.

The innovation consultants have successfully managed to bridge the gap between the CHI partners and thus to implement a long-term strategic agenda on creating health innovation through education. ■

ANETTE BIRCK is the Director of Copenhagen Health Innovation and strives to develop the strategic foundation of the partnership as well as to facilitate new networks and new collaborations.

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