

Health System Transformation Lecture

King County Equity and Social Justice Initiative

Introduction

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Well, good afternoon, everyone. We're going to start in just a minute, so I'll give everybody a chance to take your seats. Well, good afternoon. I'd like to welcome you to the second in a series of health system transformation lectures sponsored by the Emory University's Institute for Advanced Policy Solutions and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's New Policy Institute. And for those of you who don't know me, I'm Anne Haddix. I'm the chief policy officer for the agency. And it is really my pleasure to be here today.

I'd also like to convey the regrets of Dr. Gerberding. She's out of the country right now on an unexpected trip. She had planned to be here, but unfortunately couldn't be here to join us. But she was—had a hand in selecting our second topic and was really hoping to be able to be here and hear this presentation. I'd also, first off, like to thank the CDC Foundation for making this lecture series possible for CDC, particularly in sponsoring, helping support our reception, which will be immediately afterwards, and all the other support that they've offered throughout the series, both in terms of physical and moral support, so—and Charlie Stokes, thank you very much for that.

I just want to say a couple of things about this lecture series, and I don't know how many of you were here for the first one, which we actually had at Emory University, but this lecture series was the brainchild of Dr. Gerberding and the president of Emory University that happened over a discussion at cocktails one night, at a reception, both expressing a desire that in this year of tremendous buzz on health care reform, that we all, all of us who are in public health and in medicine at Emory and here at CDC really try to push this conversation more broadly—that we really make sure that we take advantage of this opportunity to have health care reform in the national debate, to really start talking about health and to start talking about health not just in the health care system, where we certainly must go when we're ill and where we go for our preventive services, but to talk about health in every aspect of our lives and in every place where we work, live, and play.

So we decided that we would have a lecture series to push the envelope a little bit, to talk more than access, more than financing. To talk about how do we build health into the way we think about transportation? How do we talk about health into how we design our food supply, how we design our communities, our schools, and our workplaces? And we started looking around for people in this country who are really exemplars of what we were talking about, who were already building models of this approach to health. We also learned early on—I think all of us knew this—but we can't have a talk about health system transformation and about health in all aspects of our lives without addressing the problem of disparities: disparities among racial groups, ethnic groups, disparities between the rich and the poor in this country, disparities between people with and without disabilities, between people who live in urban areas or rural areas. And that every time we think about a program or a policy or a change in the law, we have

to look not only at the impact on health overall, but on what are the factors that contribute to disparities and how can we create policies that will close those gaps?

And I mention this today because one of the exemplars of health system transformation who's been addressing health in every aspect of his, the community he serves, but also addressing the equity and social justice issues around health in that community, is Ron Sims. And so that's why I'm so pleased to be able to introduce him to you today. He—Ron Sims is the Executive of King County, Washington. He has dedicated his career to public service. It's hallmarked with a dedication to social justice, good government, and environmental stewardship. He has worked not just in health, but in green space, in bringing the salmon back to the rivers in the area—I was reading his bio—it's—he is the Renaissance Chief Executive for a county. Ron Sims has a lifelong dedication to racial equality and a commitment to Washington and his community. He's a native of Washington. For those of you—I know most of you know a lot about King County, Washington. We've had, CDC has had lots and lots of interactions with that county, with programs in that county, with the University of Washington, with Group Health, and many other relationships. But King County, Washington, is the third-largest county in the nation. It's the home of Seattle, with 1.8 million people, but it's—which is about 30% of the Washington population and 40% of the state's jobs. But it's huge, beautiful, but very diverse county.

It sounds like a great place to live, but like many other places, it has its share of problems. And Ron Sims is committed to solving those problems and to closing the gap in racial disparities in that community. And one other fact, as I welcome him today—the Seattle magazine voted Ron Sims the 2006 Husband of the Year. So, in addition—[Applause] I mean, I can't imagine the work that he has set out, and being able to balance work and family life. That is, I think that that is really the model for where we want health to go in this country. So with that, Ron Sims.

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