

February 1, 2017

Dear Team,

I hope this finds you enjoying the New Year and settling back into the swing of things with the new semester.

Dr. Brandon Grimm, Dr. Deborah Levy and I started the New Year and semester by revisiting health departments throughout Nebraska. We were graciously hosted at the Four Corners Public Health Department (York), the Central District Health Department (Grand Island), the South Heartland District Health Department (Hastings), the Two Rivers Public Health Department (Holdrege), the Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (McCook), and the West Central District Health Department (North Platte). The trip provided us the opportunities to hear about the successes and challenges at the local level and for us to offer our assistance to work with our students, faculty and staff.

We finished up at the Panhandle Public Health Summit in Gering, Nebraska, which launched their Community Health Needs Assessment/Community Health Improvement Planning process and highlighted their Panhandle Health Coalition. I had the honor to speak to attendees about the state of Nebraska's health. A huge thank you to Ms. Stacey Coleman who worked tirelessly on this ambitious agenda!

Speaking of the state of Nebraska's health, the America's Health Rankings 2016 report came out in December 2016. Unfortunately, Nebraska's ranking went down from 10th in the nation to 12th. This, of course, is not the direction we hoped to go. As we toured the state, different news outlets interviewed us multiple times. Our message remained the same. We have the ability to be the healthiest and most equitable state in the nation. We just need the will and resources to make it happen. I highlighted excessive binge drinking and obesity as two of our biggest challenges along with tobacco use.

It is evident how much our health departments need us to help them with training and implementation of public health practices. There are still too few people – albeit those who are, are doing great jobs - trained specifically in public health.

President Bounds visited campus on January 30 to hold a forum to discuss the University of Nebraska's budget. I am sure everyone is aware by now that we face significant fiscal challenges. As part of its response to these challenges, The University of Nebraska has created a Budget Response Team to re-think University of Nebraska operations. President Bounds talked about what we need to be concerned about and how we can work together to build a future. I encourage everyone to stay informed of this situation and if you were not able to

attend the forum, you can view President Bounds summarizing his comments from his visit to our campus.

Thank you to Dr. Melissa Tibbits who has been the Chair of the College's Evaluation Committee, for her service and congratulations to Ms. Aleta Gaertner who will now take on this role. As you know, the Evaluation Committee (EC) designs and administers the assessments needed for the CEPH Self-Study, annual reports, and strategic planning. I know that Aleta's experience and skills are well suited for this position and that she will work collaboratively with leadership, faculty, staff, students, and stakeholders regarding the Evaluation Committee's needs.

Dr. Melissa Tibbits was also the recipient of a Distinguished Scientist Award. The award, sponsored by the chancellor, recognized Melissa as one of the most productive researchers and scientists in the country over the past five years. Melissa's work in child and adolescent health is essential to prevent STIs, teen pregnancy and violence in our communities.

This week, we received a message from President Bounds and the Chancellors on the travel ban executive order. In part, it said, "Now more than ever, we must be more inclusive, not less. And universities should lead the way." This is as true for us at the College of Public Health where social justice is part of our DNA. Now more than ever we play an important role as champions of health and justice to in our local, state, national and international communities as both public health professionals and citizens. The first step is to show respect for everyone and foster an environment of inclusion at the College.

Always listening,
Ask

Ali S. Khan, MD, MPH

Retired Assistant Surgeon General, USPHS

Dean and Professor

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