



UCSF Department of Medicine ZUCKERBERG SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL

NURTURING A PARTNERSHIP OF EQUALS: UNIVERSITY AND CITY

Shared Mission

Like an enduring marriage, ZSFG unites two incredible partners – UCSF and the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) – in the shared mission of serving vulnerable San Franciscans. The relationship includes a rich history, occasional conflict, a powerful synergy and exceptional leadership. Creativity, collaboration and community are central to the union.



Susan Ehrlich, MD

“No matter what, the partnership is the most important thing,” said ZSFG CEO Susan Ehrlich, MD. “Like a marriage of 20-plus years, you know each other really well and are committed to making it work.”

“This is a strong relationship that has always had some historic tensions,” said Claire Horton, MD, MPH, Professor in the ZSFG Division of General Internal Medicine and Chief of the Medical Staff at ZSFG. “Sometimes it’s inherently hard to navigate because both systems are so complex. But it’s an incredibly beneficial relationship, and the leadership, especially over the last several years, has done a lot to improve communication and collaboration.”

The partnership goes back almost 150 years, when UCSF began providing clinical services to the City and County of San Francisco (CCSF) in 1873. The first written affiliation agreement between UCSF and the CCSF was signed in 1959, covering a

handful of services totaling about \$175,000. That scope increased, and a new affiliation agreement was signed in 1994. It currently is \$194 million annually – about one-fifth of ZSFG’s entire budget.

Under this broad agreement, all ZSFG physicians are UCSF faculty members, and ZSFG provides educational opportunities for about 400 medical students, residents and fellows each day. UCSF provides many other services, including ZSFG’s dialysis unit, clinical and echocardiography laboratories, respiratory therapists, biomedical specialists, information technology, citywide case management, and the Trauma Recovery Center. The CCSF is the lead partner for nursing, food and nutrition services, pharmacy, environmental services, regulatory issues, and other areas. “The affiliation agreement addresses virtually everything we do at ZSFG, and it’s unusual to find a place where UCSF providers and staff are not working side-by-side with DPH staff,” said Dr. Ehrlich.

The two partners have overlapping and complementary missions. The SFDPH is focused on public health and caring for the most vulnerable residents of San Francisco. UCSF shares this mission of service, but also has a statewide, national and global focus, as well as commitments to teaching and research. ZSFG provides space for UCSF’s world-class scientists to study many topics, including HIV treatment, traumatic brain injury, food insecurity, homelessness, disparities and health equity, bioterrorism, tobacco and tuberculosis. About 290 ZSFG-based principal investigators lead nearly 900 individual grants totaling more than \$150 million annually. Three-fifths of grant funding is generated by the Department of Medicine.

“Our partnership with DPH also allows one of our

major training sites to be focused on vulnerable patient populations,” said Dr. Horton. “We’ve developed really exciting resident training programs, and many of our grads take public health leadership roles. It’s a powerful combination to have a residency program with the clinical excellence of UCSF, paired with the window into the incredible work of the DPH.”

Facing the Pandemic Together

ZSFG’s response to COVID-19 exemplifies this exquisite collaboration. “We are all using our strengths together, and I think it will be a model for the United States,” said Dr. Ehrlich. For example, Mayor London Breed, DPH Director Grant Colfax, MD, and other city officials took early and aggressive action to adopt shelter in place and physical distancing orders.

“The other part is our UCSF scientists who are hard at it, developing tests for infection as well



Sue Carlisle, MD

as serologic tests, and looking for ways that our immunity may give us clues to a vaccine,” said Sue Carlisle, MD, PhD, Vice Dean of the UCSF School of Medicine at ZSFG and Professor of Anesthesia. “Our ability to provide scientific expertise

is absolutely essential to the DPH.”

For example, one potential treatment for COVID-19 is an HIV medication called Remdesivir. “Because we have a research infrastructure at

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ZSFG, one of our faculty members, Annie Luetkemeyer, MD, said she'd be the principal investigator for the Remdesivir trial here," said Dr. Horton. "If we were a public hospital without an academic link, it would be a lot harder to seize those opportunities for our patients."

The partnership also allows ZSFG to better prepare for a potential patient surge. "We have



Claire Horton, MD

a deeper bench of very skilled clinicians when we include our trainees," said Dr. Horton. "That's going to help us weather the crisis, because we'll have an all-hands-on-deck approach with a lot more hands."

This is not the first time UCSF and SFDPH have tackled a huge problem together. "With the AIDS epidemic, we developed world-changing interventions," said Dr. Carlisle. "If we didn't have such a strong partnership, we wouldn't have been able to do that. I'm very hopeful that we'll repeat that success. The current crisis has strengthened the recognition that we're all in this together, and we're moving towards an even stronger partnership."

An Evolving Relationship

The course of true partnership did not always run smooth. Dr. Carlisle recalled a meeting where former Mayor Willie Brown, Jr. and former Dean of the UCSF School of Medicine Haile Debas, MD, exchanged heated words over whether UCSF provided more services than the CCSF was paying for, or whether the CCSF was being shortchanged.

"Since then, we've had very intense negotiations around what services we provide and how the City pays for them," said Dr. Carlisle. "Over the past five years, we've worked together very closely with the City, looking at each line item to see if it's something the City wants to buy, and whether we're making this as efficient as possible. We came up with a much better, fairer, more reasonable way to establish a budget." To optimize communication, Drs. Carlisle and Ehrlich and their teams

meet weekly, and touch base almost daily.

Some of the biggest challenges are space, money, and navigating two large bureaucracies. "Getting a contract through both the University and the City is really challenging, and makes your heart stop," said Dr. Carlisle.

For Dr. Ehrlich, personnel and legal issues are the thorniest areas. "With personnel, each side has its own rules, and on the legal side, each side is primarily protecting itself," she said. "But there's a spirit of collaboration and wanting to work together in the best, most transparent way."

Earning Respect

Because UCSF and SFDPH personnel work so closely together but are employed by two separate organizations, effective leadership requires a different skill set than organizations with a more traditional chain of command. For example, Dr. Horton served for many years as Medical Director of the Richard Fine People's Clinic, overseeing SFDPH nurses, clerks and others, as well as UCSF physicians who reported to their division chief, not her. "I essentially had no direct reports, and had to do everything by influence and goodwill," said Dr. Horton. "That said, we all know that informal authority usually trumps official authority."

One important part of garnering this moral authority was forming tight bonds with her nurse managers. "The nurse leader was really skilled at conveying to the staff why we needed to make changes and implement new programs," said Dr. Horton. "I could be part of the team that was leading changes without overstepping my boundaries."

Dr. Horton also used Lean quality improvement methodology to cultivate buy-in. "Instead of saying, 'I saw a TED talk about this cool thing that another clinic is doing, and we should do it,' we get input from the frontline staff about what we know about the problem, figure out a range of things we might be able to do, and then pick one," she said.

She also cited the importance of not avoiding conflict. "Sometimes you have to say no, but you can explain why you're saying no, or why you wish you could say yes," said Dr. Horton. "Also, when you make a mistake, it's really important to say so. If you want to engender a culture in which people

can freely say, 'I should have done that differently,' then you've got to be willing to say that yourself." At all levels, this shared commitment to clear communication and vulnerable populations has made the UCSF-SFDPH extraordinarily successful. "ZSFG is unlike almost any other public hospital because of this very close partnership between the University and the City," said Dr. Carlisle. "The passion of the people who work here is palpable, and that's one of the things that makes it so special. This is not only a partnership, but a mutual dependency. We all have the same goals – to make the city and the world a better, healthier place."

"It's very important when you have a university and a public health department joining hands to utilize the best of both, and to not shy away from complexity," said Dr. Ehrlich. "We face the good and bad times together, and that's another way the partnership has grown strong over the years. Everybody comes here because they believe intensely in the mission of this place. It gives us all a real sense of purpose and true north."

Elizabeth Chur

Editors: Neil Powe, Laurae Pearson, Brooks Bigart

SPOTLIGHT

ZSFG Engages in Action for Racial and Health Equity



The ZSFG community held a vigil and knelt together on June 2, in memory of George Floyd and other black people who have been killed by police brutality. ZSFG and UCSF are engaged in actions for learning, listening, support and change.

Please visit diversity.ucsf.edu/addressing-discrimination for a list of resources compiled by the UCSF Office of Diversity and Outreach to engage in anti-racism work and practice solidarity.

Honored and Elected

Former Chief of Medicine at ZSFG and current Dean of UCSF School of Medicine **Talmadge E. King Jr., MD**, was honored with the Elliot Rapaport Award at this year's Medical Staff Dinner.

Catherine Crawford, MD, San Francisco Primary Care Resident, is a recipient of the Krevans Award 2020.

ZSFG medical staff elected **Lisa Winston, MD**, Division of HIV, ID, & Global Medicine, to the role of ZSFG Chief of Staff, effective July 1, 2020.

