

ABSTRACT: 2015 ELAM Institutional Action Project Poster Symposium

Project Title: Developing a Unique Physician Assistant Program to Meet the Growing Needs of our Healthcare Workforce

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Background, Challenge or Opportunity: As the Affordable Care Act is implemented with the intent of increasing access to primary care and preventive care services, there is a need to increase the number of primary care providers. The justifications for the establishment of the UNC Physician Assistant (PA) program are based on this need and several important elements including the maldistribution of NC physicians; UNC's desire to sponsor a high quality PA program and make PA education available in an affordable publically-sponsored medical school; and to provide a mechanism to create a pathway for veterans with medic training to become physician assistants and assist in addressing the shortage of medical care for the state's underserved. Military medics are prepared through extensive training and experience while in the service. They receive training in emergency and clinical medicine, veterinary medicine, and dental care. While deployed, medics often administer not only to service personnel but others in the communities where they serve. They leave the service highly skilled and experienced, but without the formal credentials needed to work in healthcare in the civilian sector.

Purpose/Objectives: To create a PA program that includes preparing veteran medics to enter the NC workforce to address the healthcare provider shortage.

Methods/Approach: UNC began the process of developing and strengthening collaborative relationships with key stakeholders. An essential collaboration occurred between UNC and the U.S. Army Special Operations Command that led to a signed memorandum of agreement that began the process for planning a PA program. A feasibility study was then conducted to determine the feasibility of establishing a graduate-level PA program with the aims of promoting high quality, accessible patient-centered healthcare for North Carolinians and a special emphasis on enrolling and training medics. Funding was sought for program start-up costs and a multidisciplinary steering committee was formed that met weekly to plan the program, hire staff, and submit an application for accreditation. An advisory committee was also formed to advise program development and evaluation.

Outcomes and Evaluation Strategy: As part of the signed agreement, the Dean of the School of Medicine (SOM), UNC System President, and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (BCBSNC) CEO and President announced plans for a new PA program at UNC-Chapel Hill. BCBSNC Foundation pledged a gift of \$1.2 million for program start-up costs; funds were also committed by the University. A PA program housed within the Allied Health Sciences Department was determined to be feasible due to: market demand, positive NC PA experience, student demand, availability of supervised clinical practice sites, availability of interested medics, cost analyses, and human, institutional and academic resources. A steering committee of UNC leaders, faculty and physician assistant leaders has been involved in planning the UNC PA program. An application for an accredited program was submitted in February. Outcomes and evaluation strategies will include patient care quality, obtaining and maintaining accreditation, successful enrollment and graduation of students including military medics, service of graduates in primary care and underserved areas, and certification and satisfaction of graduates.

Developing a Unique Physician Assistant Program to Meet the Growing Needs of our Healthcare Workforce



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Background

- As the Affordable Care Act is implemented, there is a need to increase the number of primary care providers.
- The establishment of the UNC Physician Assistant (PA) program are based on this need and several important elements including:
 - The maldistribution of NC physicians
 - UNC's desire to sponsor a high quality PA program and make PA education in an affordable publically-sponsored medical school
 - To provide training for veterans with medic training to become physician assistants and assist in addressing shortage of medical care for state's underserved
- Military medics are prepared through extensive training and experience while in the service. They receive training in emergency and clinical medicine, veterinary medicine, and dental care
 - While deployed, medics often administer not only to service personnel but others in the communities where they serve
 - They leave the service highly skilled and experienced, but without the formal credentials needed to work in healthcare in the civilian sector

Purpose/Objectives

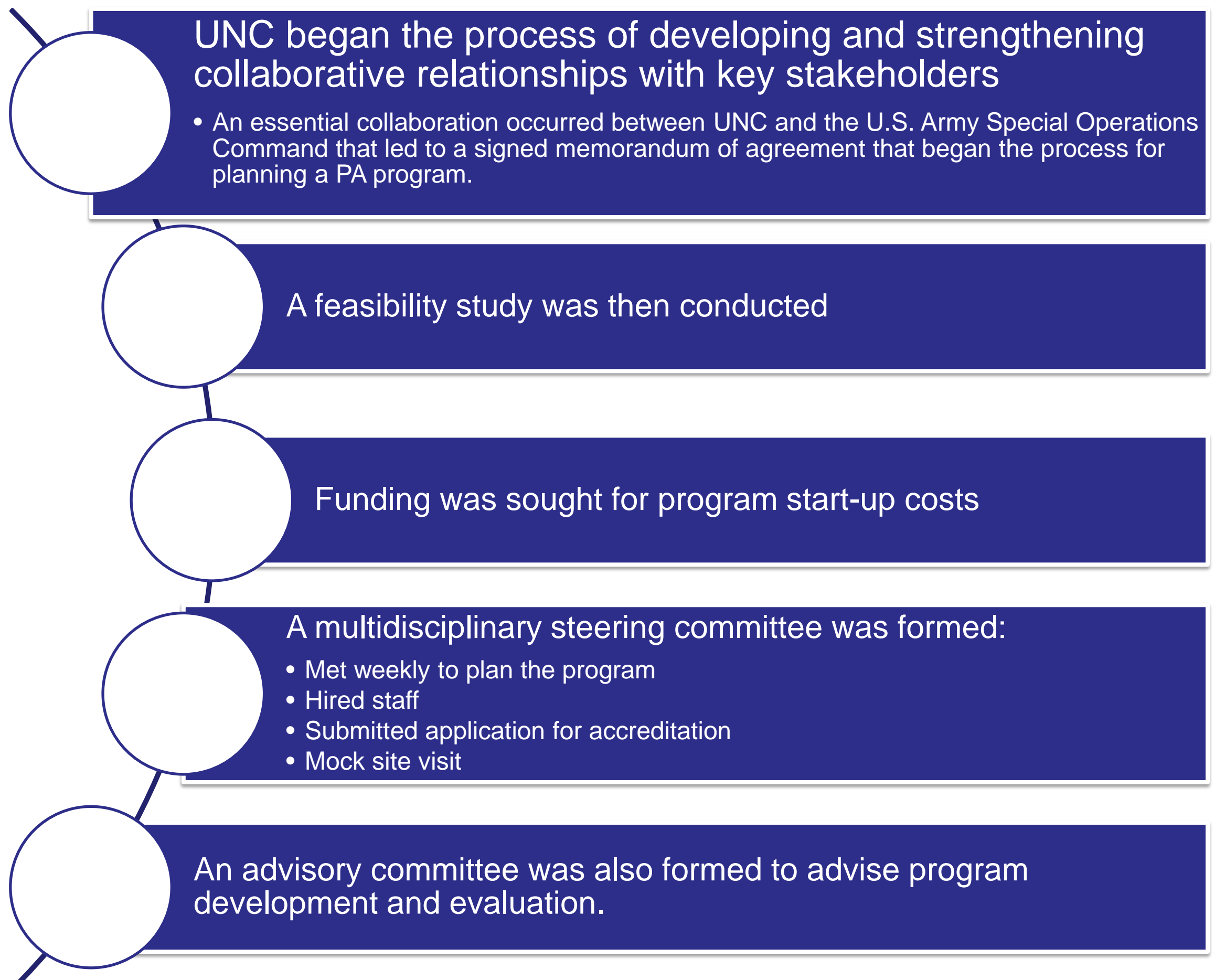
- To produce didactically and clinically competent and contextually sensitive Physician Assistants by providing an educational environment that fosters learning and prepares students for a range of clinical practice settings
- To prepare generalist PA students for practice settings in rural or urban medically underserved areas through emphasis on health promotion, disease prevention, cultural competency, and primary care
- To develop and promote an interdisciplinary orientation to health care delivery
- To provide educational and training opportunities for non-traditional students, with attention to all veterans especially those who have served in medical military settings such as the special forces medics, for careers in medically underserved areas



Outcomes and Evaluation Strategy

- Outcomes:**
- As part of the signed agreement, the Dean of the School of Medicine (SOM), UNC System President, and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (BCBSNC) CEO and President announced plans for a new PA program at UNC-Chapel Hill.
 - BCBSNC Foundation pledged a gift of \$1.2 million for program start-up costs; funds were also committed by the University.
 - A PA program housed within the Allied Health Sciences Department was determined to be feasible due to:
 - Market demand
 - Positive NC PA experience
 - Student demand
 - Availability of supervised clinical practice sites
 - Availability of interested medics, cost analyses
 - Human, institutional and academic resources.
 - A multidisciplinary steering committee of UNC leaders, faculty and physician assistant leaders has been involved in planning the UNC PA program (see co-authors)
 - An application for an accredited program was submitted in February 2015, plan to enroll summer 2015
- Evaluation strategies will include:**
- Obtaining and maintaining accreditation
 - Certification and satisfaction of graduates
 - PANCE pass rates
 - Job placement in primary care & underserved areas
 - Matriculating veterans

Methods/Approach



Col. Peter J. Benson addresses the audience during an event to announce the collaboration of BCBSNC and the UNC School of Medicine to create a physician assistant (PA) master's degree program designed for returning military veterans.