

**Understanding “Contagious Health” in
Kentucky, Kenya, and Jordan:
The Executive Summary**

Prepared by the Lipman Family Prize Fellow Team:
Bhargavi Ammu, Sofia Cunha, & Renata Cobbs-Fletcher
The University of Pennsylvania, Wharton School of
Business

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

It is a warm, sunny spring day in Pineville, KY. A palpable “buzz” of excitement is in the air as the community prepares for the annual Mountain Laurel Festival. Amidst the flurry, a local woman sits in the Subway sandwich shop, eager to share her experience with the Microclinic International (MCI) program as both a program participant and a local program board member. It is clear that the MCI program has impacted her entire family. Not only did she lose weight and improve her own health, but her participation trickled down to affect her family. When she asks her eleven-year-old granddaughter to grab drinks, her granddaughter returns with waters instead of soda. She feels better about herself and is somewhat of a one-woman crusader in spreading contagious health throughout her community. This anecdote aptly highlights MCI’s “contagion effect,” demonstrating how the model brings about positive changes in attitudes and behaviors related to health outcomes.

Microclinic International (MCI) is a non-profit organization that is revolutionizing how chronic diseases are prevented and managed around the world. Building on epidemiological evidence that suggests healthy behaviors are transmittable across social networks, the Microclinic strategy leverages human relationships and networks to address both non-infectious and infectious disease epidemics such as diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and HIV/AIDS. This network uses human connections and communities to realize positive behavioral changes in individuals and communities related to their health and wellbeing. To date, over 1500 “Microclinics,” which are small groups of individuals who join together and engage in related activities in their efforts, have been established across three continents (Microclinic International, 2013).

MCI has received numerous awards from organizations such as the World Diabetes Foundation, the International Diabetes Federation, Google, TED Fellows program, UC Berkeley Big Ideas, the Strauss Foundation, the Mulago Foundation, the Rainer Arnhold Fellows program, PopTech, Opportunity Collaboration, the Cordes Fellows Program, the Clinton Global Initiative University, the Blum Center for Developing Economies at UC Berkeley, the Deshpande Foundation, Humana Inc, and the DoSomething Award. Former World Bank President A.W. Clausen started the MCI Clausen Fellowship program, which enables top university graduates and students to get exposed to MCI’s programs.

Purpose and Audience

Most recently, MCI was selected in the spring of 2013 as one of three finalists for The Barry & Marie Lipman Family Prize, an annual global prize housed at the Wharton Leadership Program at the University of Pennsylvania. This case study, written by Lipman Family Prize Fellows, all of who are May 2013 graduates of three graduate and undergraduate schools at the University of Pennsylvania, highlights MC’s innovative model.¹ The purpose of this case study is to:

¹ Please see Appendix A for more information on the Fellow team and the Lipman Family Prize.

1. Capture the field experiences of MCI in order to develop a document that provides a rich, clear, and impactful narrative of MCI's innovative work.
2. Produce a learning document that can be understood, shared, and appreciated by multiple stakeholders.
3. Highlight MCI's impact and transferability across various contexts and locations, as well as its scaling potential and future plans.

The study is intended for the following stakeholders:

1. **Use by MCI and its partners and potential funders** as a consultative product intended to increase and enhance the organization's visibility, sustainability, and growth. The case is also intended to educate the broader community about MCI's work and impact.
2. **Use by The Lipman Family Prize, the Wharton Leadership Program, and their partners** as a tool to build institutional knowledge about the work of MCI and other Lipman Prize finalists, with the aim to spotlight their work. It will also foster student learning for the Lipman Family Prize Fellows.

Methodological Context

The methodology implemented in this study is the case study qualitative research approach, as described by Joseph Maxwell (2005). There are several strengths associated with conducting qualitative research studies, many related to the inductive nature of the research (Maxwell, 2005). A case study is a particular qualitative research methodology in which researchers explore a single subject in depth by collecting data from multiple sources (Creswell, 2007). Ranging from explanatory, to exploratory, to descriptive, the case study approach is appropriate when researchers establish clearly identified cases and seek to augment understanding around them (Creswell, 2007).

Ethnographic methods best fit the needs of this study, since they allow for the use of many data collection methods in order to study a single circumstance (Goulding, 2005). As such, data were collected from the following sources:

1. Review of available literature around MCI's work through existing public materials (MCI website, Lipman Family Prize application, funder websites, and other relevant literature).
2. Telephone interviews and electronic surveys with six key MCI staff members working across three regions in various roles:
 - a. Program Founder & CEO
 - b. Chief Operating Officer and Senior Executive Vice President of Program Management
 - c. Senior Vice President of Strategic Development
 - d. Senior Vice President of Special Projects
 - e. Jordan Program Manager
 - f. Kentucky Program Manager
3. In depth, on-site field visits to MCI Kentucky, which allowed for the collection of field notes, additional staff interviews, and participant and partner interviews:
 - a. Director, Bell County Health Department
 - b. Participant, Microclinic Cycles 1 & 3

- c. Participant, Microclinic Cycle 2
- d. Board Member, Team Up 4 Health
- e. Staff, Team Up 4 Health
- f. Participant, Microclinic Cycle 3 and Board Member, Team Up 4 Health
- g. Director, Cumberland Valley District Health Department

After a review of literature, the Fellows developed questions for interview instruments collaboratively with MCI staff. Interviews are a vital part of qualitative research, as they ensure that multiple perspectives are reflected in the case study (Hammersely & Atkinson, 2009). Additionally, qualitative research is an iterative process, and while in the field, Fellows adjusted interview questions based on context and geographic location. In addition to the creation of interview instruments, Fellows also took field notes during site visits. Field notes and participant observations are consistent with ethnographic research methods (Goulding, 2005; Creswell, 2007), and thus are an important tool for researchers conducting qualitative research studies.

As part of the data analysis process, Fellows met at the end of each day to discuss interviews, identify themes that arose from data, and highlight other relevant information. While the researchers already developed certain a priori codes, they also employed inductive coding for themes during data analysis. According to David Thomas (2003), inductive coding allows qualitative researchers to analyze data in a straightforward way; it lets the research establish themes that are inherent in the raw data. As such, inductive coding has fewer restraints than more traditional methodologies (Thomas, 2003). Following field work, Fellows then organized their data by theme in a series of data analysis sessions, which were guided by the case study specific data analysis process highlighted by Creswell (2007), which included performing a holistic analysis of the entire case featuring a deep analysis of themes.

Findings and Recommendations

After careful research and extensive fieldwork, the Fellow team identified several key areas that demonstrated MCI's success. The Fellow team found that:

1. The MC model leverages social networks to educate populations and spread healthy behaviors. Social networking and positive health are "contagious" and the use of social relationships and networks must be leveraged in new and positive ways.
2. MCI engages with local community members to understand their needs, and collaborates with governmental, public, and private sector organizations.
3. One of the greatest successes of MCI's initiatives is the ability to integrate healthy habits through a community-based approach that harnesses the power of organically functioning social networks.
4. MCI tackles issues related to access specifically in KY by opening a community garden, working to support the construction of fitness parks, and expanding to more rural areas.

In addition to these findings, the Fellow team offers the following recommendations as MCI continues its impactful and innovative work in Kentucky:

1. Continue to collaborate with the State Health Department and other municipal branches of government in KY to further improve access through the construction of fitness parks and sidewalks in more neighborhoods.
2. Explore the possibility of providing post-enrollment support for participants after they complete the official program.
3. Think about new ways that MCI could more directly impact and perhaps even involve children in KY, given that the rates of childhood obesity are extremely high.
4. Explore the possibility of developing more partnerships that reflect a strong referral network and the ability for various existing service providers to collaborate on holistic health.

Conclusion

The Lipman Family Prize commends the dynamic and innovative work of Microclinic International. Through its global reach, rigorous commitment to measuring impact, and proven model of transferability, this organization has demonstrated that it is truly unique and valuable. By leveraging existing social capital within networks to create novel and effective ways to foment health within and through communities, Microclinic International holds a unique position within the global public health sphere. It espouses a vision to impact communities through a systemic approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of various factors that influence health. The organization's idea of using healthy behaviors to promote 'contagious health' is one that has proven to be both successful and meaningful. By successfully collaborating with governmental, non-governmental, and private sector organizations, MCI has been able to engage in meaningful partnerships and garner support from existing bodies to further its mission in marginalized communities. Working to address the debilitating infectious and non-infectious diseases that are rampant in so many communities, Microclinic International is successfully filling a gap in providing a more sustainable, transferable, and holistic approach to wellness across the globe.