

EDITOR'S NOTE

Are you truly collaborative? If you spend some time thinking about what it means to collaborate successfully, you know it involves a complex set of skills. Collaboration, at its most basic level, involves working together toward completing a common task or shared goal. At its highest level, when collaboration succeeds, it leads to worthwhile reform, whether a better process at work, a safer living environment or improved health.



**BETSY
TAYLOR**

It's not easy; it is rewarding. The thing is, true collaboration is a challenge. It involves more than motivated people signing on to help out with something because they're joiners or achievers. Our cover image shows how collaboration involves thinking about who should be at the decision-making table and then changing that table to include the necessary voices that you're not hearing from. It involves listening and deep thinking about what you're trying to accomplish. It involves unifying around reaching a shared end result, and knowing enough about the data, the best practices, the funding, the culture and the personalities involved to stay the course. Whew. Not easy, but worth it.

This issue of *Health Progress* looks at care and community collaborations both inside and outside of health care settings. Some of the articles detail wonderful collaborations you may not have heard much about. Others may be more familiar but delve further into the specific

processes for what has worked or been a stumbling block to true collaboration. There has long been the thinking that competition lies at the heart of improvement in health care. But several of the authors make a case for collaboration, that teams where people bring their individual strengths and talents can build toward a whole that will make a difference when tackling a problem or working for change.

Another lesson from this issue is that good collaboration sometimes requires saying "no." No, that's not where our focus should be. No, I don't think this project uses my particular skills to the best advantage and use of my time. But it leads to the "yes" of where we're trying to go, and how. Here's where our priorities are, and here's why. Here's the metrics we're trying to move and how we're going to get there. Here's where we need to reach people where we haven't before, or here's a service we're adding to make people's lives easier. Because all that collaborative work ultimately can lead to new opportunities or improved systems for patients and others we serve. Collaboration can be messy; it can slow things down, but when done well, it can result in real and lasting good.

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