

Thrivecast Episode 46: Community Partnerships in Clinical Spaces

Trish Kritek: [00:00:00] Welcome to another episode of the University of Washington's Thrivecast, the podcast designed to help school of medicine faculty thrive. I'm Trish Kritek and today we're joined by Dr. Shaquita Bell. Dr. Bell is a clinical professor in the Department of Pediatrics in the School of Medicine and she's the Senior Medical Director at Odessa Brown Clinic.

She is also a friend and a colleague and someone I'm super excited to talk about the topic that I've been wanting to talk about for a while, which is how best to partner with communities in the clinical work that we do. And Shaquita, I thought it would be great to have you come and join us today because I can't think of anyone who's better at this than you.

Shaquita Bell: Well, thanks so much for having me, Trish. I'm really excited to be here. I think the partnerships with community is such an important concept that really drives the mission and vision of the Odessa Brown Children's Clinic. So I can't think of a better thing to [00:01:00] talk more about.

Trish Kritek: Perfect. The reason I thought this was a good topic is because there's lots of faculty Early career folks, and I'd say later and mid-career folks too, but really a lot of passionate early career folks who are like, I would really like to bring more connection, partnership, really true collaboration with the community in which I deliver healthcare and serve.

And so, I want to think of those folks as we have this conversation, but before we jump into kind of the details, I thought I'd start with a kind of a bigger overarching question. And that is kind of like, why do you feel like it's essential to be true partners with the patients and families with the communities that you serve?

Shaquita Bell: Well, you know, I often joke that if I wasn't a physician, I'd probably work in public health. And part of that is because when you have community collaboration, when you understand the needs of the community, you're actually impacting health on [00:02:00] a community level. So I am absolutely driven to serve and work with the family in front of me.

But I think it's even better when I can impact health outcomes on a community level. You think about COVID 19. When we were doing the early vaccine rollout, yes, we want to vaccinate the patient who I'm having a visit with right now, but what is the, what is their household vaccine rate look like? What does their neighborhood block vaccine rate look like? What does their community vaccine rate look like? That's where we really get to population health. And that's what's the power in working in community with collaborative approaches.

Trish Kritek: Yeah, it resonates with me that if you have a true collaborative relationship already, then you will be a trusted partner who is going to allow you to kind of go above and beyond or go into those other spaces that you're alluding to that I know were essential during the pandemic and continue to be essential.

One question [00:03:00] that comes up is, okay, I'm really passionate about this. I really, I care about this healthcare that I'm delivering. I'm a pulmonologist. So let's say I'm a pulmonologist and I have a clinic and I work in this clinic and it doesn't feel like we have like really a true partnership with our community.

And I feel that, and I'm curious about like, how do I start to build that relationship? How do I start to enter into that space to kind of take the next step? Cause I think a lot of us work in spaces where we care about the community that we're in, but maybe we're not truly partnered with that community.

So where do you start? Where, where could one start?

Shaquita Bell: Yeah, it's a great question. I think I haven't written my book on this, so I don't have like my, uh, here's my five point strategy, but I'll start with saying one really important approach is to not have the, not have made up your mind. Not say, okay, this is what the community needs.

It's really important to say, to bring curiosity, really, to not even [00:04:00] say anything, to listen, to really start to strive to listen and hear and reach out, not with an agenda other than wanting to be present and wanting to establish relationships. The other thing that I think is really useful is to invite people in.

So just literally reaching out to, if you drove down the street and you saw that This church is really busy on Sundays. And they're a block away from your clinic, reaching out to that pastor and saying, you know, I want to know more about about your congregation and how there might be partnership here.

Or, maybe there's a nonprofit that's two blocks away that. You have driven by and you, you say, oh, I wonder what they do there. You know, go in, meet with somebody, shake a hand, make a phone call, send an email and, and those things lead to other conversations. So the person who works in that nonprofit is like, Oh, we teach kids how to hammer nails into wood.

Well, okay. I'm not sure how that fits, but you know, we take care of kids. So maybe there's some partnership [00:05:00] there. Maybe there's some collaboration there, or maybe they know another nonprofit that's two doors down that tries to clean the air. And that has a lot to do with being a pulmonologist. So a lot of it is not necessarily having an agenda other than trying to partner and understand what the needs of the community are.

And then bringing people in. One strategy I have is actually creating a community board so that I have a natural place where I listen and they tell me what to do.

Trish Kritek: That's really important. So many great things there. So number one is like, be curious and listen, start with listening. And I deeply appreciate that kind of in life, but I think particularly here, as opposed to imposing, here's what I think, you know, you need.

It's actually, what do you need? And then I like the kind of being curious about the community and going and checking out places and meeting people. I suspect there's some people out there who are more introverted than extroverted. Do you have any advice for those people who might not feel super comfortable stepping into those spaces?[00:06:00]

Shaquita Bell: Yeah, I mean, I think you can definitely ask for help. Like maybe there's somebody else on your team that's a little more extroverted. I think the inviting people in piece is really interesting. Like, like we build a board and while I am their single point of liaison, I have each of our team members come to meetings so that they can just listen and hear.

They don't have The, they don't even have to come on camera if they don't want to. But then they get to listen to what's being said. And oftentimes if you're just trying to put your toe out there, there are community events that are virtual that you could just listen in on. And, and that's really a great place to start.

Cause you're also bringing curiosity. You're not making it about yourself. You're really trying to be a fly on the wall.

Trish Kritek: Those are great tips. And I want to come back to what you said before, and you just highlighted again, and that is creating a community board. And I wonder, these things are probably just inherent practices now, because this has been going on for so long, [00:07:00] but are there strategies for A, kind of who you invite to be on a board?

And B, I'm going to be really specific, like, when you meet and where you meet, do you think about those things to make it as inviting and thoughtful as possible?

Shaquita Bell: Yeah, so we, Odessa has had a long history. So Odessa is the clinic that I work at and for, and we've had community boards, we've had community listening sessions before, and I think it really is, again, being flexible with what we know folks need and want. We really couldn't like bring people physically in during the pandemic, for instance, for several years. And so we had online outreach of like you can drop in and ask a question or raise a concern. I think. There was a couple of pieces that were really important. One is making sure that this is not another tax station on the community.

[00:08:00] So for me, it was important that one, these folks are decision makers, not advisors. They're not just giving advice. They're actually in charge of making decisions. That impact the clinic to that. They're paid for their time. That is probably should be number one. That's very important. And then building a space where you're doing these checks and balances.

How often do you think we need to meet? And making ourselves available to the collective or to the majority both voice. So right now we meet on a monthly basis, virtually we have twice a year in person meetings, and then weekly. Offer community events, uh, like we're doing a CPR training in a couple of months based on what the requests are.

So the community brings to us, Oh, we have, we really want to learn more about fentanyl overdose. What is fentanyl? Why are kids dying from this? And so then we say, okay, like let's, when is a good time? Do you want to do it during the summer? Do you want to do it at night? Do you want to do it on weekend? And then we'll bring the expertise.

We'll [00:09:00] provide the space. We'll provide the teaching and the materials. And they're telling us what they want to learn about. The other thing I think in terms of asking it's again, resourcing it. So we put ads out in social media, in neighborhood community, in newspapers. We're trying to also have our dollar reach the community in every single way.

So we're thinking about using community newspapers to advertise so that we're putting the advertising money back into the community as well. Uh, and there's a million other examples, but I think, um, I think that's how you get creative and I think the more you do this, the more you learn, the more connection and reach you have, because every person you talk to has five to 10 other people that they could bring in on this, or that are part of their board and their community group who have other groups that you could connect with.

So one, just one relationship can take you to the next level.

Trish Kritek: I think the part about paying people is really important for folks to hear. And, and then maybe the other thing that I [00:10:00] want to pull out is it's not just asking for people's opinions. It's actually letting folks make decisions. And, and I think the same thing is if you invite their perspective that you actually listen to that perspective.

So. Appreciate all of those. And I really appreciate, like, it could snowball. It could snowball and keep helping you in many different ways and really becoming a true part of that community. Uh, and a central part of that community. I'm wondering if you've ever seen it. Well, I know you probably have seen it go awry or where you've seen challenges and why things might go awry.

Shaquita Bell: Yeah, I think there's a couple of reasons but usually it relies on communication. So one person has one set expectation or one group has an expectation and the other group has a different expectation. And so I think

communication, be it around what the issue is or how you're going to address it or the expectations of an event.

I think all of that is where, where the. Investment [00:11:00] around collaboration is communication. I feel like I am writing my book or getting my five page, my five stage trending brands work together now. But yeah, I think that's the biggest piece is really not being on the same page. And I can think of several examples.

I think what is important to do in that for me, as the institution or as the broader position of power is to say, I'm sorry, you know, we miscommunicated. That's on me. How do we get back on the same page? And what can we do to make this better? It's really accepting responsibility and moving forward. I think the other time I see it really often is, and it's why I started your very first question with the listening, is that it is really easy, especially in healthcare, to think that you know what the problem is.

And oftentimes the community brings us something different. And it may be interrelated, but if you are pushing, if you are pushing and pushing, you're [00:12:00] not listening. And I think then even if you, are right. And the problem is that there isn't a bike lane on the street that you live on, and which is just a hypothetical example.

It doesn't matter if you're right, because if you're not aligned with the community, then it's not going to be successful. It's going to be really, really hard to be successful. So if the community saying gun violence is the issue, and you're saying bike lanes are the issue, those things may be related.

But unless you're talking and listening, then you're not going to, you're not going to help the community's problem. And you're probably not going to be successful in addressing the problem you've identified.

Trish Kritek: I like that coming back to what I think we all do. I mean, I definitely do it, which is like I'm solutioning and I'm coming up with what I think the solutions are already, and in these situations, I would say in lots and lots of situations where you're a leader, it's pausing and saying, okay, I don't.

Need to bring the solution. I need to listen to what the problem is that other folks are telling me and actually hear that. So I think it's [00:13:00] essential

here. There's already a potentially a big power differential and maybe there's a level of distrust already. And that can only exacerbate that challenge.

I asked you kind of, and maybe implicitly in that question is like, what do you do if you do mess up or you lose the trust of the community or something happens where it doesn't feel like a partnership? And I think I heard you say, the first thing you do is you apologize. Are there other strategies on kind of how to right the ship when those things happen?

Because I think I don't want to say they're inevitable because I don't think that they're necessarily inevitable, but it's likely there will be bumps in the road and trust is. Hard to, to gain and easy to lose. So thoughts on that for the thoughts on that, as you prepare your book of the future,

Shaquita Bell: I think apologizing is important.

I think communicating is important in that example. I would also say, don't do this. If you don't, if you don't plan on sticking around, cause [00:14:00] building trust or rebuilding trust, both of those things take time and people are much more likely to trust you if this is. This is not a one and done, or we got to have this decision in the next four weeks or yeah, push, push, push.

I mean, one of the things I say to my team is it takes the amount of time it takes. It's going to take as long as it takes and that's okay. And we're going to get comfortable with it, which is a shift in the mindset for people who work in healthcare, right? We, everything's 20 minute visit slots. But work with community and in community takes time and things happen. There could be a shooting. There could be a death of a matriarch. There could be something. And that stalls the conversation for a little while. So I think patience, which is something I try to work on communication, apologizing.

And then I think you also hit the nail on the head is building solutions together to say, okay, we messed up. This isn't working. I'm sorry. Somehow we miscommunicated. What do [00:15:00] you see as our next step forward? How can we, should we meet again? Should we, you know, scrap this project and start over? You know, what do you think is best?

And to keep bouncing it back, I'm hearing, it's like motivational earring. I'm hearing you say that this didn't work. Tell me more about that. Tell me more

about how it made you feel. It's, I do love the joint shared decision making and shared solution finding.

Trish Kritek: Yeah, I think those are like good lessons and just getting along with people in general.

And I think they, sometimes we forget to do those things in our administrative spaces and our collaborative spaces. And so I appreciate kind of coming back to first principles, which resonates with me. I'm curious, cause we always talk about like when it doesn't go well, but, but what are the things that are happening when you're like, this is working, this is a good partnership, or I actually have created a space where people feel like they're part of the.

Creation and the iteration of this place, like what tells you that it's going right?
[00:16:00]

Shaquita Bell: Well, what I get most excited about is innovation is you come to this place where you have found a solution that. Neither a person or one group would have come to themselves, but it is like beautiful and wonderful and unique and is exciting.

Like everybody's excited to try it. Everybody thinks it's going to be successful. And again, being in it in the long run, you actually get to see it be successful. That's what I get real. That's why I'm like, Oh, this is working. When we have found an innovative approach to something. And it feels great. And everybody's kind of high fiving and gelling and, you know, just really like, okay, what's the next problem we can take on.

That's when you know that you've done something right. I think one example I can think of is, is our community board had a proposal for early childhood navigation. And what we had heard from the community is that our, our kids are having This crisis of, of [00:17:00] behavioral health and we, we need some solutions, but we don't even know how to talk about it.

And as parents, we don't know what to do. And we built this community board and then the community board got to build this early childhood navigation program and, and fund it. And then that group came back six months later and presented the data of how many kids they met and parents feedback on the process.

It was all really great and it felt really great to have this group be able to see. What they've accomplished in such a short amount of time to I mean, it was six months from being funded to showing data that is showing improvement. So that's how you know it's going. Well, you got to smile.

Trish Kritek: I mean, yeah, I mean, first of all, that's super cool program.

And I think it's great that it kind of came to fruition so quickly and you could see the impact and I can only imagine how exciting it is for those people who came to the table and said this is what we need and you were able to actually make that happen. I have one more question and that is, you know, [00:18:00] Odessa Brown has been a part of the community for really a long time and I'm a little bit curious, you know, you already alluded to the fact that, like, you shouldn't show up and then peace out right away.

This is a relationship that you're building. How do you maintain that relationship over time? Because I could see that it could ebb and flow. And I'm wondering if there's any kind of natural nurturing of that relationship that's important, or if it's just naturally happening because you have your board, et cetera.

Shaquita Bell: I think it's a little bit of, you know, some of it is that I stepped into shoes and, and generations of leaders who have laid the groundwork. Absolutely. I think you should never just rest on your laurels. There's new groups forming. Our communities change, right? We have new populations moving in. We have people who move south or move north because of gentrification, for instance.

So continuing to look for new opportunities is really important. And then, you know, honestly, I think. It's uh, assess and reassess, you know, the, the old, [00:19:00] whatever PDSA for our continuous improvement folks. It's making sure that you don't just say, okay, I've checked that box. Now I'm going to move on to something else.

And then I think making sure that people can reach you. So, you know, I, you know, I think I got an email today from somebody I haven't talked to in two years. It's like, Oh, I'd love to touch base. And then my first answer is yes, of course. I think that's important that you have sort of an open door. And then finally, I'll say one of the things that I've learned over time is.

Reaching back out. Okay. I just saw this grant come across my, my email. It's not a great grant for Odessa, but I remember talking to youth care about their facility for LGBTQ+ youth. Let me shoot this to them and say, Hey, I was thinking about you guys and saw this grant. I don't know if it could help, but you know, hope you have a nice Thursday, like those sorts of little tiny things.

It's one email. It took me two minutes. I pressed forward, wrote two lines, but that helps me stay connected with folks. And they know I'm thinking of them. They know we're in this together. It's [00:20:00] not me against them for money. It's not me against them for activities. I think. It's a little bit of practicing the practice too because I always joke that I want a child to have five different opportunities.

They get to choose who they want to see. It's not just I want to steal all the kids for myself. So making sure that you actually walk that walk and it can be like, sometimes I'll write a list like, Oh yeah, this community passageways does this, youth care does this, this church is really focused on, uh, immigrant community so that I can then remember, okay, if I see an opportunity or, or introduced, like I'm, I'm the new CEO or ED of this community nonprofit, Oh, let me introduce you to this person and that person that you can meet new people too.

And I just feel like that was the last chapter of my book, which is 17 ways to stay connected. That was a lot, but I think, you know, it's, it, I think. I am a very extroverted person, so I will acknowledge that all of those things take a lot of social time, but I enjoy it, too. That helps.

Trish Kritek: [00:21:00] It's clear it's energizing for you, and I really appreciate, you are an extrovert, but you also talked about the fact that you have intentionality, intentionality in maintaining those connections, intentionality in like thinking of the folks who are new in the community, where there's New spaces to kind of step in and who you need to check back with.

So even though I know that it comes extremely naturally to you to reach out and talk to people, there is intention in making sure you're kind of hitting all those spots and not forgetting people and kind of coming back around, it sounds like to me.

Shaquita Bell: Yeah. And we, you know, we have a list of folks too. So we now, for the last three years, while I've been senior medical director, we come up

with an annual report and I consider our community partners to be part of our stakeholders and part of the people we report to.

So that report goes to them and I personally send it and say, you know, I really appreciate our partnership over the last year. I wanted to share with you all the things that Odessa has accomplished, and I look forward to another year of working together and. [00:22:00] That almost always I get a reply back like, Oh yeah, look, that vaccine clinic we did together is in there, you know, sometimes they get a special shout out to depending on the relationship or, or what we're doing together.

And I think that's a nice way of making sure that it feels like it's a bi directional relationship, which we haven't talked much about, but I think that's also important. It's not just what people can do for us. It's what we can do for them as well.

Trish Kritek: Yeah, I think that is a really good point to make and I'm a little bit curious about you said you personally send it out to folks and I think that probably makes a big difference.

You also said people are personally emailing you. And so how do you make yourself accessible? And maybe there might be people who are like, I want to be accessible, but I don't want to be accessible 24 seven, but maybe you need to be, I want to understand that a little bit because the part where people can connect with you as a part of the clinic, but also as the leader of the clinic is important.

And I'm curious how you navigate that.

Shaquita Bell: Well, I think [00:23:00] every leader should set boundaries for themselves. So for me, email is what I'm comfortable with on a personal level. People don't have my cell phone. They don't have my home address, but they do have my email. And because they have my email, I can decide when I reply, how fast I reply, what days I'm available to reply.

But it also allows me to see, like, if I'm getting You know, five different people saying we really got to do something about firearm violence. I'm, I'm visibly seeing that, that inbox message and it helps me start to notice trends too. So that's why I like that. It definitely changes with the time of year and what's going on, how busy that keeps me, but again, I would go back to like setting

our own boundaries about how involved you want to be, and that may give you sort of direction on how Big of a scope or how much of a community involvement you want to have like this is integral to our mission and existence of Odessa Brown.

We consider [00:24:00] ourselves a community health care center. And so it is part of my job. I consider it, if not, I would say it's close to the majority of what I do, and it's in my job description is external facing partnerships, which I interpret as community based partnerships. So I make time for it. And it's part of my day and week as I plot out how I use my time.

And it is more, it's a higher priority than should we buy new BIC pencils for the clinic. That is an email that goes down the list. If a community group is reaching out and needs help, that email goes up the list.

Trish Kritek: I think that prioritization is really helpful to make explicit. So thank you for that. And I think it's also you're absolutely right that everyone has to kind of feel it out for yourselves.

But, but it's an essential part to be accessible in some capacity. And however, you define that and to be able to be in that dialogue on a regular basis. Okay, you've shared a ton. You've given many, many, many pearls, but I wonder, and I usually [00:25:00] end my podcast with asking, if there is one last pearl you want to give folks who might be listening and saying, this is stuff that I really want to try to dig into, and I haven't known exactly how to navigate this.

Is there any last pearl that you want to share?

Shaquita Bell: I would say I have underestimated and now appreciate how powerful it is to bring somebody physically to my clinic, walk them through what it looks like to care for patients in a pediatric practice. This is, this is what the medical clinic looks like, this is what the dental clinic looks like, this is what the reading nook looks like.

It's very physical experience for people to understand what you're doing. And then the opposite is true for you to go to them to say, Oh, this is what. What a crisis drop-in center looks like. This is how much space you all have to work with, and this is how much staff you have to work with. Those experiences have been some of the most informative for me.

You learn so much about what the other person is doing [00:26:00] and what they're doing. What the opportunities are like, where's their synergy? Where are you like? Oh, wow. Have you guys ever thought about this? And they might say the same to you. Have you thought about that? So I think that that's one pearl I will share. The other thing I'd like to say is you can start really small. I mean if you are one person who wants to make one relationship, that's a start.

That's enough. I think you know, I shared that this is a big piece of my job and the expertise. Expectations of this role. And so I have dozens of connections, but that doesn't translate to what everybody has to do. You can really start small and build. It's more about intentionality, about meaning, about listening, investing your time and your energy to be really present, even with one group.

Trish Kritek: Thank you so much. I feel like there's been a wealth of information in a short period of time. And while we've joked, I don't think the book is a bad idea for the future. So I really appreciate all the teaching, all [00:27:00] the perspective, and all the insights. I think that folks will get a lot out of this podcast.

Shaquita Bell: Well, thanks so much for having me.

Trish Kritek: Of course. And I'll say to everyone out there, if they want to listen to more episodes of Thrivecast, they can find them at Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen to your podcasts. You can also find them on the School of Medicine faculty website at <https://faculty.uwmedicine.org>. Thanks for listening and have a great day.