Public Health is Return On Investment

R.O.I.’s Life Story
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This is the story of Roi and how the Virginia Department of Health played an integral part in her life. The Western Tidewater Health District helped to take care of her even before she was born. Early in her mother’s pregnancy, her mother agreed to be in the Healthy Families Program. Mom was assigned a paraprofessional who helped the young family get health insurance, referred them to needed resources, educated them on all sorts of important things, and kept in close contact with them. Before Roi’s birth, Mom attended a Car Seat Class at the Health Department. A very nice lady taught Mom all about car seat safety and even gave her one to take home. Mom, with WIC support, breastfed Roi. Baby Roi really liked that because she could eat whenever she wanted and especially liked being close to Mom. The WIC Program had breastfeeding peer counselors, just in case Mom had a problem.

Roi’s mom was advised that she could also get the baby’s Immunizations (shots that keep her healthy) at the Health Department. In fact, Roi went there all of her life to receive every needed vaccination.

Roi grew to a young woman, dated a nice young man and they decided to become sexually active. She remembered her mother talking about taking her to the Health Department. In order to practice safe sex, she called the Health Department to schedule a screening in the STI Clinic. During her physical exam, she was screened for sexually transmitted infections. A HIV and syphilis lab test was obtained. She also received condoms to have on hand for her partner. The nurse discussed with her the importance of protecting herself against sexually transmitted infections.

Her relationship went well and Roi and her boyfriend were married. She wanted to know more about birth-control options. She made an appointment at the Family Planning Clinic. During that visit, she was counseled about taking vitamins with folic acid prior to any future pregnancies and how folic acid protected babies from neural tube defects and autism. Plan–B for emergency contraception was discussed in the event she forgot to take her pills for a succession of days. During that visit, nutrition and immunizations like MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) were discussed. She was also given a free bottle of prenatal vitamins.

Later that spring, Roi and a small group of friends planned a picnic at the park. She asked her girlfriend, Jenny, to bring the delicious chicken salad from the deli on the corner. They all feasted, but Roi and Jenny were the only two who ate the chicken salad. After about three hours, they both experienced stomach cramps, followed with nausea and vomiting. The symptoms were so severe that they went to the hospital for treatment. After being treated and released, Roi thought the chicken salad may have made her and her friend sick so she decided to contact the Health Department. She spoke to an Environmental Health Specialist about the incident and thorough investigation into their food history was performed including a review of the deli’s food safety procedures.

She thought back to her last encounter with the Environmental Health group and remembered her boyfriend being bitten by a stray dog two years prior. After the Environmental staff conducted their investigation, the Epidemiology department followed up and made sure he received his post–exposure rabies vaccines at the hospital.
Roi reflected over the years and she was pleased to know that the Health Department was there to meet her needs. She shared her experiences with other friends and family who didn’t know about the services at the Western Tidewater Health District.

Fast forward a few years … Roi and her husband entered middle age in good health and were ready to venture into a new phase of their lives. They built a house in the country where city water and sewage was not available. They needed a drinking water well and a septic system to be installed. They visited the Environmental Health Office at the Western Tidewater Health District. While working with Environmental Health, they discovered that these programs are very complex, but the staff made each of the steps easy to follow. Within a few weeks they had a drinking water well constructed, an operating septic system installed and they were ready to move into their dream home. Roi and her husband were educated about their systems so that they could keep them in great operation condition for many years...

While visiting a Health Fair Roi met the Medical Reserve Corps Coordinator who convinced her to volunteer with the Western Tidewater Unit. Roi received interesting training in subjects like First Aid, CPR, Shelter Operations, Mass Dispensing and personal Emergency Preparedness. She helped to direct traffic when the EP&R staff conducted their annual Drive Thru Mass Dispensing Exercise to assure that they were prepared in the event of a bioterrorism attack. She gained valuable experience and worked right alongside Public Health staff, assisting them by registering clients and helping people with special needs when her community opened a shelter after a storm.

A few years later, they were preparing for a humanitarian trip in an exotic part of the world where certain preventable communicable diseases were present. Roi and her husband visited the Health Department Foreign Travel Vaccine Clinic and received information on what vaccines they should receive. With no problem, they were able to get all required vaccines and were off on their adventure...

When they returned from their trip, Roi’s daughter came to her and said that she thought she may be pregnant. Roi accompanied her daughter to the Health Department Pregnancy Testing Clinic for a pregnancy test which was positive. Roi’s daughter was referred to the Health Department’s Nurse-Family Partnership Program for home visits. Similar to her mom’s case years earlier, a registered nurse came to the home and visited regularly throughout her pregnancy and assisted her with maneuvering through the health care system. This gave good comfort to Roi’s family and especially to her daughter so that she could have a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby.

While attending a community event, she passed a table with a nurse from the Health Department taking blood glucose and blood pressure measurements. She stopped to have her blood glucose checked and found that it was normal. What a relief! The nurse informed her about the Diabetes/Chronic Disease programs in Western Tidewater and taught her about things that she could do to keep her heart strong and her blood sugars normal including dietary measures, exercise and other things that helped her to live a long and well life.
Once her screening was complete, Roi stopped at one of her favorite restaurants for supper. She spotted the health permit on their wall and knew that an Environmental Health Inspector from the Health Department had been out to make sure they were following safe food practices. She headed home pleased with her day.

Months passed and Roi was very excited about the arrival of her first grandchild. She saw a billboard explaining how she needed a Tdap in order to protect the baby from pertussis. She wanted to do everything possible to keep the new baby healthy so she went to the Health Department for a free Tdap shot. It hurt a little, but she didn’t mind.

While she was at the Health Department, the nurse in the Immunization Clinic wanted to know if she was interested in receiving her flu shot. In reviewing Roi’s record, the public health nurse said she could also receive the pneumococcal shot to prevent pneumonia. Roi had received the vaccine to prevent Shingles five years earlier. Even though Roi hadn’t planned on receiving three shots that day, she wanted to stay healthy and prevent disease. She wasn’t getting any younger.

Many years passed and Roi tried to stay healthy, but a fall caused by a stroke left her weakened when she was 82 years old. She wanted to remain independent and in her home and heard about a program where someone could come and assist you in the home. She called the Health Department. They arranged for a nurse to come out and do a Nursing Home Screening on her even though she wasn’t ready to go into a nursing home just yet. She qualified for Medicaid according to Social Services and soon had a nursing assistant helping her in the home. This nursing assistant came from the Health Department’s Personal Based Care program. Roi was able to stay at home with the assistance of the Personal Care Aide.

One evening, Roi was enjoying her dinner of roast beef, corn on the cob and ice cream for dessert. Afterward, her aide assisted her in flossing and brushing her teeth. The aide marveled at the fact that this woman, at 90 years old, still had all of her teeth. Roi explained she had seen the Public Health Dentist at the health department Dental Clinic when she was in elementary school and had learned a great many things. She was taught proper brushing and flossing techniques (which she used all her life); she was able to get sealants to prevent cavities on the chewing surface of her teeth and she learned of the hazards of tobacco (a product that not only browned people’s teeth but could result in oral cancer, gum disease and tooth loss). Roi related to the aide, that Western Tidewater had fluoride in the water. She enjoyed not only systemic benefits of fluoride when she was young but it also provided topical benefits as she got older for the prevention of cavities in between her teeth.

Roi developed a very bad illness several years later. When the nursing assistant showed up one Monday morning, she found that Roi had died. The family went to Vital Records at the Health Department for a copy of the death certificate so they could notify Social Security. While there, they saw the nurse who had done the nursing home screening. Roi was just like family so the nurse hugged them and said she was so sorry about the loss... The nurse said Roi had lived a long life and now, at 92 years old, she could rest in peace.