



Lars Blackmore

A LUCKY ACCIDENT LEADS TO A CAREER IN HEALTH CARE

KELLYANNE JOHNSON WASN'T THINKING ABOUT A CAREER IN HEALTH CARE UNTIL SHE HAPPENED UPON AN INTERNSHIP THAT INSPIRED HER TO HELP MAKE 100 MILLION LIVES HEALTHIER

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A “LUCKY ACCIDENT” IS HOW KELLYANNE JOHNSON DESCRIBES her passion for public health. As an undergraduate majoring in international affairs and economics at Northeastern University in Boston, Johnson knew she wanted a career that allowed her to think “broadly about the world and to solve problems on a macro-level.” However, it wasn’t until her senior year, when she began interning at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) in Cambridge that she began to see public health as a potential career path—and a framework for thinking about global issues.

“I came to IHI without a real understanding of their work or how interconnected health care and access to care is with so many other sectors in the public domain, like education and economic development,” Johnson said, adding that she also didn’t realize that “a career in health care was possible outside of a traditional clinical or research setting.”

Although she might not have had a full understanding of IHI’s mission as a young intern, Johnson says she found the people and stories of the place truly inspiring.

“At the staff meetings we would get updates on projects and stories about patients. I was so engaged and motivated by the specific stories of patients’ struggles and how quality improvement in health care was making things better,” she said.

After her internship ended, Johnson was offered a full-time position working with IHI’s New Business team. There, she helped design and develop large-scale programs in North and South America. She also managed a learning system for Medicare Accountable Care Organizations.

“It was a great opportunity to work at IHI in this role at that time, after the enactment of the Affordable Care Act. It broadened the focus from a traditional hospital-centric one to one that allowed for more focus on population health and improving health in communities,” she said.

Johnson has recently taken on a new role at IHI, as a senior project manager working on the implementation team for 100 Million Healthier Lives—a global project that brings together leaders from the community, health care sector, government, and academia in order “to improve health, well-being, and equity.”

In one flagship initiative of 100 Million Healthier Lives called SCALE, Johnson and the IHI team are working with local leaders from 24 community coalitions across 21 states in the United States.

“SCALE provides a foundation of support for these local leaders so they can work across sectors in order to achieve their goals for improving health in their communities,” Johnson said. “By developing relationships, peer-to-peer networks, and effective learning systems, we are able to accelerate the spread of good ideas and practices between communities.”

With “so many exciting things” happening at IHI, Johnson certainly wasn’t interested in leaving her job; yet, she was interested in pursuing a graduate degree and “building her foundational knowledge of health care and public health.” So, when she heard about The Dartmouth Institute’s new online Master of Public Health program, she didn’t hesitate.

“I’m fortunate enough to be part of a lot of very inspiring conversations at work, I think this program will strengthen my voice in those conversations,” she said.

And, since she returned from the first of the two-year program’s six short residential periods, held in Hanover August 8-13, she has not stopped talking about it.

“It was an incredibly energizing and exhausting week,” Johnson said. “Since I’ve been back, I haven’t stopped talking about the people I met and the conversations we had about what is and isn’t working in the health care system.”

PAIGE STEIN