
JOSLYN TROWBRIDGE

Fostering Dialogue in Complex Organisations



The most critical link in a chain can be at the simplest level, like a hospital telephone operator who connects a patient with the right caregiver. If this breaks down, the best-trained doctors and the most sophisticated equipment are of little use.

Joslyn Trowbridge, MPP Graduate Class of 2009, is helping improve access to, and the quality and integration of neurosurgery services in Ontario. With 11 adult centres spanning a million square kilometres—much of it rural, and serving more than a third of Canada’s population, it takes a lot of effort to make that phone call work.

Before studying at the Hertie School, Trowbridge worked as a national projects manager in a charitable organisation. During her MPP, she interned at AmericaSpeaks, which organises large-scale town meetings on public issues. She was fascinated by the dynamics of relationships between various actors in organisations and by the ways in which non-policymakers could influence government.

“I came away with a deep sense of commitment to procedural instruments, such as advisory committees and citizen engagement processes,” says Trowbridge, who runs 20 stakeholder committees and working groups within her agency, part of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

Trowbridge wants these people and the varied—and sometimes conflicting—interests they represent to have a voice, whether health care providers, administrators or community supporters. Her job is to connect chiefs of neurosurgery with health policy analysts, hospital CEOs with community providers, nurses with patient support groups—people who might otherwise not have a chance to exchange views.

Through meetings and research, she collects information to make improvements in adult and paediatric critical care, trauma, neurosurgery and epilepsy care systems.

Every few months, Trowbridge organises a visit to a healthcare facility for her team, to keep sight of the real-life impact of their policy work.

“My view of good governance includes an agreement and focus on the end goal,” says Trowbridge. “Seeing the quiet hustle inside a trauma-neuro Intensive Care Unit reminds us of our commitments to patient-centred care.”

Joslyn Trowbridge has worked as an advocate for citizen engagement and public-decision-making, encouraging public participation in policymaking with AmericaSpeaks in Washington DC and founding a grass-roots programme for violence prevention for young women in Montreal, among other dialogue-based initiatives.
