“As people live longer and face more chronic disease, what happens in between doctor visits becomes more important. There has to be more emphasis on self-management,” says Carol Lucas, AP Assistant Professor at UNCG in the department of Public Health Education.

That’s where health coaches come in. Instead of taking a traditional approach by telling patients to improve their diet, exercise or lose weight, health coaches function as partners and allies on the journey, Lucas said.

“We might say, ‘This is where you are now. Where would you like to be? And how can I help you get there?’” Lucas said. “Instead of directing people, it’s more guiding them. There is a lot of research that shows this approach offers improved outcomes.”

Health coaches can work anywhere from doctors’ offices and community care settings to pharmacies and elsewhere. Their contact with patients may be in person or via telephone.

UNCG’s Health Coaching Programs are growing to accommodate this sea change in health care, which is prompted in part by the Affordable Care Act and its emphasis on reimbursing physicians and health systems for keeping people well. The initial idea for the program took root in 2012 in a class taught by the late Bill Evans. Evans was passionate about health coaching and he believed it would become increasingly important in the future of health care.

Today, the program has grown to offer a wide variety of training ranging from one-day workshops and three-day certificate programs to webinars, specialty training and skills refreshers. Nearly 250 students participated at some level in the 2014-15 academic year.

The program is led by Dr. Dan Bibeau, chair of the Department of Public Health Education; Regina McCoy, professor; Lucas; and three graduate assistants: GracieLee Weaver ’11, ’14 MPh, and Laura Bolton and Brandon Mendenhall, who are both pursuing master’s degrees in public health at UNCG.

“Our programs’ emphasis on coaching is unique,” Lucas adds. “We are at the forefront as a resource for health coaching nationwide, and that’s very exciting for UNCG.”

**WANT TO KNOW MORE?**

UNCG’s Health Coaching Programs will sponsor a conference on Oct. 1 to bring professionals across different disciplines together for information about best practices in coaching, skills and strategies.

Speakers will include Dr. Susan Butterworth, an associate professor with the School of Medicine at Oregon Health & Science University and a national expert on health coaching; as well as local and regional physicians and care providers. For more information, email coaching@uncg.edu or visit www.uncg.edu/phe/coach.