

CENTER SPOTLIGHT

A quarterly newsletter highlighting NCCPHP activities and accomplishments



January - March 2009

During these times when resources and funding are limited, it is often difficult to support necessary, but sometimes costly, public health training programs and classes. The North Carolina Center for Public Health Preparedness (NCCPHP) offers many options for distance-based training and professional development that can assist individuals and agencies facing tighter economic circumstances.

Our NCCPHP Training Web Site has more than 150 free online awareness-level trainings on topics as varied as outbreak investigation, post-disaster response, public health law, and public health laboratory functions. The *North Carolina Epi Teams Training Curriculum* offers group-based learning, including 6 case studies and 2 additional activities. We also offer a 3.5 hour training, *Introduction to Mental Health Preparedness*, designed for public health staff or volunteers who may participate in a disaster response. The training includes a video and workbook and is appropriate for self-paced or small-group environments. Free continuing education units (CEUs) are available for all of these trainings.

As an organization, we have made several modifications to better serve our partners during these challenging financial times. For example, the *Introduction to Communicable Disease Surveillance and Investigation* course co-sponsored by our North Carolina Division of Public Health partners, has had a required travel component in the past. This component has been eliminated and the course timeline has been adjusted in response to increased workloads at local health departments. Similarly, as part of the ongoing rollout of the North Carolina Electronic Disease Surveillance System, NCCPHP has been assisting state partners by increasing distance-based training through regular webinars in an effort to reduce travel costs.

In these challenging times, we are hopeful that through innovative approaches we can continue to help our partners meet their organizational training needs.

---Pia MacDonald, NCCPHP Director

Surveillance & Epidemiology

Team Epi-Aid (SPH student volunteers assisting with urgent public health response)

On March 6, 6 Team Epi-Aid volunteers participated in a pilot test of a Reproductive Health Needs Assessment survey in Kenly, NC (Johnston County), where tornadoes touched down in November 2008. Volunteers worked with local health department staff to conduct in-person interviews with

Publications

Thomas JC, **MacDonald PDM**, Wenick E. Ethical decision making in a crisis: A case study of ethics in public health emergencies. *J Public Health Manag Pract.* 2009;15:E16-21.

Hajat A, Cilenti D, Harrison LM, **MacDonald PDM**, Mayes GP, Baker EL. What predicts local public health agency performance improvement? A pilot study in North Carolina. *J Public Health Manag Pract.* 2009;15:E22-33.

Hightow-Weidman L, Golin C, Green K, Shawl E, **MacDonald PDM**, Leone PA. Identifying people with acute HIV infection: Demographic features, risk factors, and use of health care among individuals with AHI in North Carolina. *AIDS Behav.* 2009; Jan 6 [Epub ahead of print].

Presentations

The following papers were presented at the Public Health Preparedness Summit; February 18-20, 2009; San Diego, Calif.:

Horney, J. The changing face of preparedness: Building and sustaining public health capacity for disaster response (Opening Session).

Rosselli R, Emory C. Gandhi A. Preparing for antiviral use and distribution: Local demonstration project findings and tools.

women of reproductive age as part of a project funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) through NCCPHP.

Technical Assistance to North Carolina

NCCPHP staff continue to partner with the North Carolina Division of Public Health in the rollout of the North Carolina Electronic Disease Surveillance System (NC EDSS). In the first quarter of 2009, 2 NC EDSS trainings were conducted each month, with one focusing on general communicable diseases and the other on tuberculosis. A total of 89 persons from 42 local health departments attended these trainings. In addition, NCCPHP staff conducted several training webinars on new features of the system. A total of 9 webinars were conducted this past quarter for 150 people.

NCCPHP staff have also continued work on a toolkit of resources for local health department planners working with at-risk populations. The toolkit, which contains examples of best practices in North Carolina, recommended planning activities, and tips, will be available later this spring.

Research

North Carolina Preparedness and Emergency Response Research Center (NCPERRC)

This quarter has been especially busy for the NCPERRC project. In January, University of Arkansas partner Dr. Glen Mays presented in Chapel Hill on public health systems and services research. March saw the unveiling of the new NCPERRC Web Site, as well as the publication of the second newsletter.

Perhaps most exciting, the NCPERRC announced pilot project mini-grants and new investigator awards to promote public health systems and services research. Grants are available for researchers at any of the participating universities: the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, and North Carolina State University. More information can be found at the NCPERRC Web Site: <http://nccphp.sph.unc.edu/ncperrc/>.

Training & Education

Training Web Site

While no new trainings were added this quarter, there were 1,852 new users of the NCCPHP Training Web Site, bringing the total number of users to 31,741. There were 5,360 new course completions, for a total of 62,130 course completions from 149 countries.

Presentations

(continued)

Sullivan SM, Rocco PM, **Davis MK**. Guiding local preparedness coordinators: Online training and mentoring.

In the News

85 local health departments trained on North Carolina's new Electronic Disease Surveillance System. *Impact: a quarterly newsletter*. The North Carolina Institute for Public Health. March 2009.

Preparedness center presents on antiviral use and distribution at national conference. *Impact: a quarterly newsletter*. The North Carolina Institute for Public Health. March 2009.

FOCUS on Field Epidemiology

Two issues of *FOCUS on Field Epidemiology* are newly available in Spanish: Volume 4, Issue 4: Diagnóstico de Laboratorio: Técnicas Moleculares (Laboratory Diagnosis: Molecular Techniques), and Volume 4, Issue 5: Diagnóstico de Laboratorio en Investigaciones Epidemiológicas (Laboratory Diagnosis in Outbreak Investigations).

Field Epidemiology Training Program for Central America

It has been an exciting and busy quarter for the FETP Central America project. The team focused its efforts on completing Module 1 of the advanced field epidemiology curriculum and making revisions to Modules 2-5. In addition, Modules 1, 2, and 3 of the basic field epidemiology curriculum have been developed and shared with our CDC partners.

In March, 2 staff members traveled to Guatemala to observe Module 1 of the advanced curriculum and participate in project meetings with CDC and Universidad del Valle de Guatemala faculty and staff. On March 27, our CDC partners joined us for a site visit to Chapel Hill to discuss various aspects of the project, including the development of an in-country tutor's curriculum, eventual migration of elements of the advanced FETP course to a distance-based learning format, and overall project progress.

Avian Influenza Online Training Course

Development of the *Seasonal, Avian, and Pandemic Influenza Training Course* continues, as we begin the process of content clearance at the CDC. The Training Course will be targeted to Epidemic Intelligence Service officers, as well as training for national public health professionals / laboratorians in other countries. Meanwhile, we are also pursuing various options for the second international pilot test of the curriculum. In addition, this project team will shortly begin working on a new curriculum for communicable disease epidemiologists, laboratorians, and other staff at sentinel surveillance sites based on existing World Health Organization guidance on influenza surveillance.

North Carolina Local Health Department Preparedness Coordinators Online Course

Following last year's pilot, the first formal session of the *Preparedness Coordinators Online Course* began in January and ran through early March, with 26 students completing the course. The course stresses relationship building and mentoring with experienced preparedness coordinators, and consists of lectures, activities, and online discussions on a range of topics pertinent to local health department preparedness. In the final course evaluation, 100% of responders (n=15) indicated that they would recommend this course to other preparedness coordinators. Another session is planned for the fall.

Introduction to Communicable Disease Surveillance and Investigation in North Carolina Course

A new session of the *Introduction to Communicable Disease Surveillance and Investigation* course for nurses at local health departments in North Carolina began in February. Seventy-five students enrolled in the course, representing more than 45 counties in North Carolina.

This session, offered in partnership with the North Carolina Division of Public Health's Communicable Disease Branch, introduces a new timeline that requires less travel and more flexibility. Students now have the option of completing the course in the standard 16-week timeframe, or requesting an extension for the remainder of the year. In addition, the in-person capstone component has been canceled due to travel restrictions. These changes allow more students to complete the coursework while not overwhelming the course faculty and staff. This session of the course also introduces new material on the North Carolina Electronic Disease Surveillance System, as well as content updates to several additional modules.

Assessment of Reproductive Health Needs After Disasters

As part of a 2-year cooperative agreement with the CDC and the Association of Schools of Public Health, NCCPHP worked with partners at the CDC to develop a reproductive health needs assessment survey instrument. In March, 25 Johnston County Health Department staff, 6 Team Epi-Aid volunteers, and 4 NCCPHP staff met in Johnston County to pilot test the instrument. After receiving training on both the survey and the tablet computers used for interviewing, teams traveled to residential areas near Kenly, NC, that were affected by tornadoes in November 2008.

A total of 19 face-to-face interviews were conducted with women of reproductive age. The interviews provide important information about the availability of reproductive health services following a disaster. A second assessment using a different sampling methodology is planned for later this spring in Wilson, NC.

Incident Command System Training Video

NCCPHP continues to work with partners at Public Health Regional Surveillance Team (PHRST) 6 to develop a training video for local health department staff on the use of the incident command system (ICS) for disease outbreak investigations. Along with didactic modules and case studies, the training video will include interviews with North Carolina local health department staff who have used ICS to organize outbreak investigations.

Workforce Development

North Carolina local health department staffs continue to use the Public Health Workforce Development System to assess employees' training needs. This quarter, 198 persons from 42 counties completed assessments in the system.

This publication was supported by Cooperative Agreement U90/CCU424255-03 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent official views of the CDC.

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***Funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to
improve the capacity of the public health workforce
to prepare for and respond to terrorism and other emerging public health threats.***