QUARTERLY REPORT
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Evidence-Based Practice for Public Health
TS-0734

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Introduction

This report covers the second quarter of Year 3 of the Evidence-Based Practice for Public Health Project, January 1 through March 31, 2004.

Adherence and Progress towards Achieving Goals and Objectives

1. We met with Dr. Roger Luckmann and Dr. Nancy La Pelle who are serving as expert consultants for the project on January 8 and 22, February 25, and March 10, 2004. We discussed our findings from the informant interviews conducted with public health professionals from the Bureau of Communicable Disease Control at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. The focus of the interviews was to determine the information access needs and preferences of public health professionals. The public health professionals interviewed perform a variety of work-related tasks that require information access. We discussed classifying the tasks of public health professionals with the information sources they use to address these tasks. Other issues discussed included public health professionals’ access to full-text journal articles, the quality of public health information provided by listservs, and ways public health professionals can access and store information. We discussed how to present a summary of the informant interview data to the informants at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and how to demonstrate and receive feedback on the identified models of information summary, synthesis, and dissemination. See Attachment 1, Summary of Bureau of Communicable Disease Control Interview Data, and Attachment 2, Characteristics of Models of Information Summary, Synthesis, and Dissemination Preferred by Staff Interviewed at the Bureau of Communicable Disease Control, Massachusetts Department of Public Health. This work relates to Objective 1: To identify at least three models of evidence-based literature approaches to clinical medicine and review their applicability to the literature of public health; Objective 2: To identify any existing preliminary models or products for assessing the quality of public health literature; and Objective 3: To evaluate the models/products for effectiveness; identify their pros and cons, strengths and weaknesses; scalability; usefulness. This work successfully meets Objective 4: To identify a narrow subject area and pilot test it within the models (products) identified for applicability with public health.

2. We submitted an abstract entitled: “Improving access to credible and relevant information for public health professionals: A qualitative study of the Massachusetts Bureau of Communicable Disease Control” for presentation at the American Public Health Association (APHA) 132\textsuperscript{nd} Annual Meeting, November 6-10, 2004, Washington, DC (Attachment 3). This relates to Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4 as described above.

3. We had conference calls with Dr. Sharon Telleen, Research Associate Professor of Public Health and Sociology at the University of Illinois at Chicago, expert consultant for the project, on January 6 and 20, February 3 and 24, and March 4, 16 and 23, 2004. We are working with Dr. Telleen to write papers for publication about our work on the identification of the knowledge domains and subdomains of public health, the compilation and classification of public health journals by public health knowledge domain, and the creation of a page on the project’s website that provides an online tool kit of evidence-based resources
for public health practitioners. See Attachment 4, Draft of Outline for Article on Evidence-Based Public Health and Attachment 5, Draft of Evidence-Based Public Health Article. This work relates to Objectives 1, 2 and 3 as described above and to Objective 7: To design an outreach and training program to increase the awareness of “evidence-based practices” in public health and encourage the use of the web products developed as a result of this study among public health practitioners.

4. We updated the list of public health journals classified by knowledge domain and subdomain of public health. The updated journals list can be found on the project’s website at http://library.umassmed.edu/ebpph/domainsjournals.pdf, and online links to the journals can be found at http://library.umassmed.edu/ebpph/journallist.cfm. This work relates to Objective 1 as described above.

5. We created a list of public health journals available for free access (Attachment 6). The list can be accessed at http://library.umassmed.edu/ebpph/freephjournals.cfm. This work relates to Objective 1 as described above.

6. We identified additional public health bibliographic databases and updated the descriptions and online access information of the databases. Descriptions of these databases and Internet links can be accessed on the project’s website at http://library.umassmed.edu/ebpph/alldbs.pdf. This relates to Objective 2 as described above.

7. We reviewed and revised the Knowledge Domains and Subdomains of Public Health which can be accessed at http://library.umassmed.edu/ebpph/knowdomains.pdf. This work relates to Objective 1 as described above.

8. We updated the project’s website, http://library.umassmed.edu/ebpph. Updates to the website include the following: 1) updated public health bibliographic databases; 2) updated list of public health journals and associated public health knowledge domains; 3) revised knowledge domains and subdomains of public health; 4) link to the Partners in Information Access for the Public Health Workforce website, http://PHpartners.org, under the “Related Projects” section of the project’s website; and 5) addition of a left frame on the project’s homepage with links to the “Knowledge Domains of Public Health”, “Public Health Journals”, “Public Health Databases”, and “Evidence-Based Resources” (Attachment 7). The project’s website has been linked from national and international websites related to evidence-based practice and public health including the School of Health and Related Research, UK; the Australian Resource Centre for Healthcare Innovations; the Clinical Information Access Online, Australia; the Social Science Information Gateway, UK; the Evidence-based Medicine Resource Center at the New York Academy of Medicine; the Health Sciences Library at Lutheran Medical Center, Brooklyn, NY; Indiana’s Public Health Information Network; the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, Canada; the University of Nottingham Greenfield Medical Library, UK; Iowa Public Health Information; Intellectual Disability and Allied Libraries, Ireland; and the Digital Libraries Network, UK. The project’s website had 1,226 visitor sessions in January; 1,770 visitor sessions in February; and 3,593 visitor sessions in March, 2004 (see Attachment 8, Usage Statistics Chart for the Project’s Website). This work relates to Objective 6: To develop a set of
“lessons learned” and recommendations for developing a “preferred” model (database, electronic publication and website).

9. We had conference calls with Kristine Alpi, the Library Manager of the Public Health Library at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and with Nancy Allee, Director of Public Health Information Services and Access at the University of Michigan on January 22 and March 22, and met with them in person on January 27, 2004 to prepare for the Medical Library Association (MLA) continuing education (CE) course, “Evidence-Based Public Health: Finding and Appraising Relevant Resources”. We worked on creating PowerPoint presentations and class manual for the MLA class (Attachment 9). We taught a practice class on March 2, 2004 to librarians and public health faculty at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. We received feedback and suggestions on improvements to incorporate into the class presentation and manual. This work relates to Objective 7 as described above.

Preliminary Plans for the Subsequent Quarter

1. Continue to work with Dr. Roger Luckmann and Dr. Nancy La Pelle to determine the information needs and preferences of public health professionals. We will continue to review the data gathered from the informant interviews of staff from the Bureau of Communicable Disease Control at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and formulate recommendations for effective ways to organize, synthesize, and disseminate information needed by public health professionals to make informed decisions for practice. We will continue to examine the previously identified evidence-based models and determine if any of these models or characteristics of these models can be applied for accessing evidence-based public health information. We will present a summary of our findings to staff interviewed at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and demonstrate and receive feedback on the identified models of information summary, synthesis, and dissemination. We will determine another area (knowledge domain) of public health on which to conduct informant interviews at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. We will present the results of the qualitative research at the APHA annual meeting in November, 2004. This work relates to Objectives 3 and 4 as described above.

2. Continue to update and post our findings on the project’s website: public health journals and associated knowledge domains of public health, public health databases, and evidence-based resources for public health practice. We plan to develop a page on our website with links to evidence-based resources available for free online access targeted towards public health professionals. We will begin to match the identified public health databases with the knowledge domains of public health and create a drop-down menu of public health databases by knowledge domain on the project’s website. We will consider creating an Access database of the identified public health journals and include information on a journal’s price, journal’s impact factor, the databases a journal is indexed in, and if the main focus of a journal is population-based public health. This relates to Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 6 as described above.
3. Finish preparing the manual and PowerPoint presentations for the CE Course, “Evidence-Based Public Health: Finding and Appraising Relevant Resources”, and teach the course at the MLA Annual Meeting in Washington, DC on May 21, 2004. We will develop a class webpage for the course and post the class materials on the project’s website. This relates to the education and training component of our project as stated in Objective 7, described above.

4. Continue to work with Dr. Sharon Telleen, project consultant, on writing papers about the project’s findings for potential publication in the journals Public Health, Public Health Reports, and the Journal of the Medical Library Association. This works relates to Objectives 1 and 7 of the research plan.

5. Match the identified knowledge domains with Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) from the National Library of Medicine (NLM). We will add a “Hints for Searching” section to the project website and include MeSH for retrieving published public health literature. This relates to Objective 5: To develop a “Hints for Searching” section on the project’s website. This section will include NLM Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) for retrieving published public health literature.

Problems, Risks, Questions, Concerns That Have Impacted Progress

Public Health is a multidisciplinary field ranging broadly across the health care spectrum. In order to develop an evidence-based tool appropriate to public health, it has been necessary to identify the knowledge domains of public health and the public health literature and databases associated with each domain. These tasks were not part of the original research plan but are necessary to undertake in order to create an evidence-based tool appropriate to public health.

There is disagreement amongst public health experts, associations, accrediting bodies, etc. as to what the knowledge domains of public health should be. Coming to consensus amongst project advisors and constituents has been a difficult, labor-intensive task. However, we feel we have made substantial progress in this endeavor and that it was worth the time and effort spent. The work we have put into this task will ultimately benefit the project outcome.

There are various ways to define “evidence” in public health. Public health evidence may include information from expert opinion, journal literature, books, government and foundation reports, conference proceedings, public health organization newsletters, listservs, and Internet sources. We will need to investigate further what constitutes public health evidence.

Despite these issues, we feel that we have made substantial progress on this project. We have met Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 of the Research Plan and are actively working on meeting Objectives 5 and 7. Now that we are in the process of analyzing the results of the key informant interviews of public health professionals, we expect to make rapid progress in meeting the remaining objectives for this project.
This project has sparked international interest from Canada and Australia and we will be thinking about ways of collaborating with others interested in this topic in the coming year. The challenge will be finding ways to do so, despite the distance.