QUARTERLY REPORT
April 1, 2004 – June 30, 2004
Evidence-Based Practice for Public Health
TS-0734

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Introduction

This report covers the third quarter of Year 3 of the Evidence-Based Practice for Public Health Project, April 1 through June 30, 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 April 7 and 30, 2004 to discuss 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 objective of the interviews was to collect data from public health professionals about how they currently access information and to determine their preferences for accessing evidence-based public health information. We discussed the results of the informant interviews and how we could present a summary of the data to the study participants at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. We also discussed approaches that we could use to demonstrate and receive feedback on the identified models of information summary, synthesis, and dissemination. 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; Objective 3: To evaluate the models/products for effectiveness; identify their pros and cons, strengths and weaknesses; scalability; usefulness; and Objective 4: To identify a narrow subject area and pilot test it within the models (products) identified for applicability with public health.

2. We presented a review of our findings to staff previously interviewed at the Bureau of Communicable Disease Control at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health on May 5, 2004. Elaine Martin, Principal Investigator of the project, introduced the project and its goals. We provided a handout for the meeting that offered information about the objectives of the project, the project team, and potential benefits to project participants (Attachment 1, Handout for Meeting with the Bureau of Communicable Disease Control, Massachusetts Department of Public Health, May 5, 2004). Dr. Nancy La Pelle, Project Consultant, presented a summary of the results of the informant interviews and provided the study participants with results of the informant interviews (Attachment 2, Summary of Bureau of Communicable Disease Control Interview Data, and Attachment 3, Types of Information Required and Preferred Sources and Access Mechanisms). Dr. Roger Luckmann, Project Consultant, presented a PowerPoint presentation, Models of Information Summary, Synthesis, and Dissemination in Clinical Medicine: Sources and Organization of Evidence-based Knowledge (Attachment 4). This presentation allowed the study participants to gain an awareness of the types of models available for accessing and retrieving evidence-based knowledge. The participants discussed the difficulties they encounter when trying to access information. These include different levels of usage of electronic information access, bombardment of e-mails, financial barriers for access to full-text journal articles and subscription information services, and lack of training. They also discussed a desire to have access to pre-formulated searches and alerts for public health queries relevant to their work and to have easy access to all free resources relevant to public health. See Attachment 5,
3. We met with Dr. Roger Luckmann and Dr. Nancy La Pelle on May 19 and June 10, 2004 to review our meeting with the study participants from the Bureau of Communicable Disease Control at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. We began to strategize how to conduct our next set of informant interviews. We discussed potential domains of public health to investigate that would present a different aspect of public health than communicable disease control. Dr. Nancy La Pelle spoke with Dr. Teresa Anderson, Director of the Office of Statistics and Evaluation, Bureau of Substance Abuse Services, at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, on June 8, 2004, to ask for her advice on possible departments at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health that we could interview. Dr. Anderson suggested that we focus on a “traditional” area of public health to investigate so that the results of our informant interviews would be applicable to the information needs of other public health state departments. We updated the script that we will use to conduct the next set of informant interviews (Attachment 6, Script for Key Informant Interviews, Massachusetts Department of Public Health). This work relates to Objectives 1, 2, 3, and 4 as described above.

4. Our abstract entitled: “Improving access to credible and relevant information for public health professionals: A qualitative study of the Massachusetts Bureau of Communicable Disease Control” was accepted as an oral presentation at the American Public Health Association (APHA)132nd Annual Meeting, November 6-10, 2004, Washington, DC (Attachment 7). This relates to Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4 as described above.

5. We had a conference call with Dr. Sharon Telleen, Research Associate Professor of Public Health and Sociology at the University of Illinois at Chicago, expert consultant for the project, April 6, 2004. Dr. Telleen visited us at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester, Massachusetts on April 12 – 16, 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 8, Draft of Journal of Public Health Article, Attachment 9, Draft of Public Health Reports Article, and Attachment 10, Draft of Journal of the Medical Library Association 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.

6. We updated the list of public health journals classified by knowledge domain and subdomain of public health and the list of public health journals available for free access. The updated journals lists can be found on the project’s website at http://library.umassmed.edu/ebpph/domainsjournals.pdf, http://library.umassmed.edu/ebpph/journallist.cfm, and
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/all dbs.pdf. This relates to Objective 2 as described above.

We updated the project’s website, http://library.umassmed.edu/ebpph. Updates to the website include updated public health bibliographic databases and updated public health journals and associated public health knowledge domains. The project’s website has received interest from the public health community in the U.S. and abroad. It has been linked from several national and international websites related to evidence-based practice and public health. The project’s website had 2,494 visitor sessions in April; 2,423 visitor sessions in May; and 2,485 visitor sessions in June, 2004 (see Attachment 11, 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).

Elaine Martin, Principal Investigator, and Hathy Simpson, Project Coordinator, attended the Partners in Information Access for the Public Health Workforce Steering Committee Meeting held at the National Library of Medicine in Bethesda, MD on April 21, 2004. Elaine Martin provided an overview of the Medical Library Association (MLA) continuing education (CE) course, “Evidence-Based Public Health: Finding and Appraising Relevant Resources” (Attachment 12, Outline of Medical Library Association Continuing Education Course) and proposed an MLA Academy of Health Information Professionals (AHIP) specialization track in public health (Attachment 13, Proposal for Medical Library Association Specialization in Public Health). The Steering Committee endorsed the proposal for the specialization track at the meeting. This relates to Objective 7 as described above.

We worked 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 to prepare for the MLA CE course, “Evidence-Based Public Health: Finding and Appraising Relevant Resources”. We mailed out a set of preliminary questions to the course participants to acquire some background information about them so that we could target the course to meet their needs (Attachment 14). We compiled the answers to these questions (Attachment 15) and created a summary chart of their bibliographic database searching experience (Attachment 16). This relates to the education and training component of our project as stated in Objective 7, described above.

We developed PowerPoint presentations for the class. The first section, Characteristics of Evidence-Based Public Health and Resources Available for Evidence-Based Health Practice, was created and taught by Hathy Simpson (Attachment 17). The second section, Tools and Resources for Collection Management of Public Health Materials, was taught by Nancy Allee (Attachment 18). The third and fourth sections, Evidence-Based Critical Appraisal and
Public Health Database Searching, were taught by Kristine Alpi (Attachment 19). This relates to Objective 7 as described above.

12. We compiled material for the class manual: Course Information; Agenda; Characteristics of Evidence-Based Public Health; Resources Available for Evidence-Based Health Practice; Knowledge Domains of Public Health; Public Health Journals and Associated Knowledge Domains; Public Health Journals Available for Free Electronic Access; Top 25 Public Health Journals by Impact Factor; Public Health Bibliographic Databases; Tools and Resources for Collection Management of Public Health Materials; Evidence-Based Public Health Database Searching; Critical Appraisal Background and Practice; Searching and Appraisal Case Study Exercises; Bibliography of articles and books used to develop the course; Sample Collection Manual from the University of Michigan Public Health Informatics Services and Access; Grey Literature Producing Organizations; and a copy of the class web page. These materials were organized into a 3-ring binder (Attachment 20). This relates to Objective 7 as described above.

13. We developed a web page for the class to demonstrate evidence-based resources and for the participants to use during the hands-on portion of the class. We plan to post all our course materials to this web page. Copies of the class web page can be found in the back of the class manual (Attachment 20) and viewed at [http://library.umassmed.edu/ebpph/mlaclass.cfm](http://library.umassmed.edu/ebpph/mlaclass.cfm). This relates to Objective 7 as described above.

14. We taught the MLA CE course, “Evidence-Based Public Health: Finding and Appraising Relevant Resources” on May 21, 2004 at the MLA Annual Meeting. The class was held in a computer classroom with Internet connection at the Himmelfarb Health Sciences Library, George Washington University Medical Center, Washington, DC. Eighteen participants attended the full day course. All participants filled out an MLA CE course evaluation form (Attachment 21, Medical Library Association Continuing Education Course Evaluations). The MLA CE office provided summary charts of the evaluations (Attachment 22, Medical Library Association Session Evaluation Summary and Attachment 23, Medical Library Association Instruction Evaluation Summary). Reviews of the course by participants were excellent. This work successfully meets Objective 7 as described above.

15. Hathy Simpson, Project Coordinator, and Jim Comes, Head of the Reference Department at the Lamar Soutter Library, University of Massachusetts Medical School, traveled to the University of Connecticut Health Center on June 14, 2004. They were guest lecturers at a class for Masters of Public Health (MPH) candidates entitled: “Evidence-Based Public Health Practice”. Hathy Simpson presented information related to findings from the Evidence-Based Practice for Public Health Project. See Attachment 24, Evidence-Based Practice for Public Health Project Presentation at the University of Connecticut and Attachment 25, Resources Available for Evidence-Based Public Health Practice, a handout for the class at the University of Connecticut Health Center. 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 determine another domain of public health on which to focus on and conduct informant interviews to public health professionals working in this domain at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. We will present the results of the qualitative research, “Improving access to credible and relevant information for public health professionals: A qualitative study of the Massachusetts Bureau of Communicable Disease Control” at the APHA annual meeting on November 8, 2004. This work relates to Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4 as described above.

2. Post all the course materials from the MLA CE course, “Evidence-Based Public Health: Finding and Appraising Relevant Resources” to project’s website at http://library.umassmed.edu/ebpph/mlaclass.cfm. We will consider the future development of a web-based course with online modules targeted towards health sciences librarians. This work relates to Objective 7 as described above.

3. 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.

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 successfully met Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 of the Research Plan and we plan to pursue Objective 5. 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.