QUARTERLY REPORT

July 1, 2004 – September 29, 2004

Evidence-Based Practice for Public Health

TS-0734

Principal Investigator:
Elaine R. Martin
Director of Library Services
elaine.martin@umassmed.edu
508-856-2399

Project Coordinator:
E. Hatheway Simpson
e.hatheway.simpson@umassmed.edu
508-856-3594

The Lamar Soutter Library
University of Massachusetts Medical School
55 Lake Avenue North
Worcester, MA 01655
Introduction

This report covers the fourth quarter of Year 3 of the Evidence-Based Practice for Public Health Project, TS-0734, July 1 through September 29, 2004.

Adherence and Progress towards Achieving Goals and Objectives

1. We requested a no cost extension of funds for the period September 30, 2004 to September 29, 2005. We sent the letter to Stacia Hall, Assistant Director of the ATPM/CDC Subawards Program on July 1, 2004 (Attachment 1, Request for No Cost Extension).

2. We met with Dr. Roger Luckmann and Dr. Nancy La Pelle who are serving as expert consultants for the project on July 8, August 1, September 1 and 21, 2004. We prepared questions for the next set of informant interviews at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH). The objective of the interviews is 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 revised the script to use with the next set of informants (Attachment 2, Revised Script for Informant Interviews at the 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; 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.

3. Hathy Simpson and Nancy La Pelle had a conference call with Dr. Teresa Anderson, Director, Office of Statistics and Evaluation, Bureau of Substance Abuse Services, MDPH, on July 8, 2004. We discussed possible departments at MDPH whose members we could interview to determine the information access needs and preferences of public health professionals in a domain that would be considerably different than the domain of communicable disease control. 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 departments in other states. We resolved that workers within the Division of Community Health Promotion, Bureau of Family and Community Health, at MDPH would be the most appropriate to interview. Hathy Simpson provided Dr. Anderson with information about the project. Dr. Anderson contacted Dr. Cynthia Boddie-Willis, Director, Division of Community Health Promotion, Bureau of Family and Community Health, MDPH, and forwarded her the information about the project. Nancy La Pelle later contacted Dr. Boddie-Willis who provided us with names of public health professionals in the Division of Community Health Promotion that we could request interviews with. We sent letters of introduction and information about participating in the study project to public health professionals at the Division of Community Health Promotion, Bureau of Family and Community Health at MDPH in August and September, 2004 (Attachment 3, Letter to Key Informants at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health).
Dr. Nancy LaPelle conducted seven key informant interviews in September, 2004. This work relates to Objectives 1, 2, 3, and 4 as described above.

4. We prepared for our presentation to the American Public Health Association 132nd Annual Meeting entitled, Improving Access to Credible and Relevant Information for Public Health Professionals: A Qualitative Study of the Information Needs in Communicable Disease Control. This relates to Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4 as described above.

5. The project’s Web site, http://library.umassmed.edu/ebpph, has received interest from the public health community in the U.S. and abroad. We received requests this quarter for information about the project and its findings from the Association of Schools of Public Health and the Chinese Cochrane Centre. The Web site has been linked from several national and international Web sites related to evidence-based practice and public health. The project’s Web site had 2188 visitor sessions in July, 1877 visitor sessions in August, and 1854 visitor sessions in September, 2004 (Attachment 4, Usage Statistics Chart for the Project’s Web Site). This work relates to Objective 6: To develop a set of “lessons learned” and recommendations for developing a “preferred” model (database, electronic publication and Web site).

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 review the data gathered from the informant interviews of staff from the Division of Community Health Promotion, Bureau of Family and Community Health at MDPH and compare the findings to data from the interviews previously conducted at the Bureau of Communicable Disease Control, MDPH. This work relates to Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4 as described above.

2. Formulate recommendations for effective ways to organize, synthesize, and disseminate information needed by public health professionals to make informed decisions for practice. We will 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. This work relates to Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4 as described above.

3. Attend the APHA annual meeting in November, 2004 and present the presentation, Improving Access to Credible and Relevant Information for Public Health Professionals: A Qualitative Study of the Information Needs in Communicable Disease Control. This work relates to Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4 as described above.

4. Post all the course materials from the Medical Library Association continuing education course, Evidence-Based Public Health: Finding and Appraising Relevant Resources, to project’s Web site 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: 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.

5. Continue to update and post our findings on the project’s Web site, http://library.umassmed.edu/ebpph: public health journals and associated knowledge domains of public health, the top 25 public health journals by impact factor, public health databases, and evidence-based resources for public health practice. We plan to develop a page on the Web site 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 Web site. This relates to Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 6 as described above.

6. 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.

7. 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 Web site 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 Web site. 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. Preliminary work suggests the needs are quite varied and more interviews than previous expected need to be conducted in order to derive meaningful results. However, we expect to continue making rapid progress in meeting the remaining objectives for this project.

This project has sparked international interest from Canada, Australia, and China, 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.

Appendix

Attachment 1: Request for No Cost Extension

Attachment 2: Revised Script for Informant Interviews at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Attachment 3: Letter to Key Informants at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Attachment 4: Usage Statistics Chart for the Project’s Web Site