SPECIAL REPORT

Editor's Note: The following two articles report on the ''Public Health Outreach Forum: What Do We Know,'' held at the National Library of Medicine on April 4 to 5, 2001. The forum reported on projects funded through NLM's Partners in Information Access for Public Health Professionals grant program. Information about projects funded through the program can be found at http://nnlm.gov/partners/public/. An agenda, list of participants, PowerPoint presentations, and other information from the forum referred to in the articles below can be found at http://nnlm.gov/partners/phof.html.

Public Health Outreach Forum: report

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INTRODUCTION

A two-day forum was held at the National Library of Medicine's (NLM) Lister Hill Center, April 4 to 5, 2001, to focus on the lessons learned by the recipients of NLM's Partners* in Information Access for Public Health Professionals grant program. The objective of the forum was to glean what could be learned from the body of knowledge and experience accumulated from the twenty-one, NLM-funded public health outreach projects. Participants included health sciences librarians from public health libraries, NLM, and the National Network of Libraries of Medicine's (NN/LM's) Regional Medical Libraries and project leaders and public health professionals from the Washington, DC, area. Eighty attendees heard speakers from the public health community as well as health sciences librarians from several of the projects. They also participated in focused panel discussions on specific topics selected by the steering committee. A list of the attendees can be found on the forum Website. At the end of the first day, time was set aside for a reception in the Lister Hill Center foyer with poster displays and exhibits by several of the outreach project representatives.

PLANNING

The idea for a gathering at NLM to share and assess experiences from the Partners in Information Access for Public Health Professionals projects began in 2000 with an initial discussion between Neil Rambo, NN/LM, University of Washington; Betsy Humphreys, NLM; and Joan Zenan, University of Nevada–Reno, at the Medical Library Association (MLA) annual meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia. From there, it evolved into a series of emails between Rambo, Humphreys, and Zenan, and, by mid-September 2000, NLM decided to host a two-day meeting the following spring in Bethesda at the Lister Hill Center. The Forum Steering Committee was formed in October 2000, consisting of Rambo; Zenan; Kristine M. Alpi, Weill Medical College, Cornell University; Catherine Burroughs, NN/LM, University of Washington; Marjorie A. Cahn,

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* The Partners in Information Access to Public Health Professionals Website may be viewed at http://nmlm.gov/partners/.

NLM; and Jocelyn Rankin, Ph.D., Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Planning began immediately for the two-day event and continued through March 2001. Most of the work was done via email with an occasional conference call for more lengthy discussions and final decision making about the forum's format and content.

Five overarching questions drove the planning process:

1. What characterizes a successful outreach project?
2. What approaches work in different settings?
3. How is outreach to public health professionals different from that to other health professionals?
4. What are some of the barriers and solutions to reaching out from an academic environment to a population-based community practice setting?
5. How can NLM and health sciences librarians nationally reach out to the public health community more effectively in the future?

What emerged from the steering committee's discussion of these questions was the development of four focused discussion panels to be held during the first day of the forum. All participants were assigned to two panels of their choosing.

FOCUSED DISCUSSION PANELS

Each hour-long panel was limited to a discussion of four questions. These questions were posted on the forum Website the week before the meeting, so that participants might look over the questions in advance. The goal of each panel discussion was to distill the experience and information the participants brought from their projects and turn these into knowledge about what works and what would be good investments in future outreach projects. The questions each panel discussed are listed below. In all panel sessions, recorders took notes and made PowerPoint slides of the salient points for each question. These were shared with all attendees during the review sessions following each set of two concurrent panel discussions.

Panel 1: assessing information needs of the public health workforce

Jocelyn Rankin, CDC, was the panel leader and Vivian Auld, NLM, the panel recorder.

1. What methods have been the most useful in identifying public health workforce information and (related) training needs?
2. What skills and behaviors are expected to be affected through outreach? What baseline measures are needed to detect changes?
3. What is known about information-related training needs in public health? How is this known? How can this be used to improve the training delivered as part of outreach?

4. Can elements of public health job functions or work environments that affect information needs be identified? If so, can this identification be used to target outreach more effectively?

Panel 2: fulfilling information needs with national, state, or local Web resources

Terry Henner, University of Nevada–Reno, was the panel leader and Ione Auston, NLM, the panel recorder.

1. How are librarians and information providers determining the kinds of Web-based information needed by public health professionals? How effective are these methods? How is subsequent evaluation validating needs assessment?
2. To what degree is the duplication of content and links among project Websites and public health organizations a concern? Could a national resource supplement the local and regional resources developed by individual projects?
3. How can partnering public health professionals be engaged to participate in developing and maintaining directories of relevant Web resources?
4. What kind of additional resources, or new areas, need to be developed and made available on the Web?

Panel 3: identifying outreach objectives and related outcomes

Catherine Burroughs, NN/LM, was the panel leader and Mary Ryan, NLM, the panel recorder.

1. What outcomes characterize a successful public health outreach project? To what extent can they be realistically measured? What baseline measures are needed?
2. What strategies or project characteristics seem to have a major impact on outreach outcomes? What approaches work in different settings?
3. How does what is known about outcomes and approaches help to determine objectives for public health outreach? Do outreach objectives for the public health workforce differ from those for other health professionals?
4. How can those involved in outreach develop a shared vision of outreach objectives and outcomes by working with partners and target communities?

Panel 4: strengthening outreach through partnerships and sustainability

Neil Rambo, NN/LM, was the panel leader and Catherine Selden, NLM, the panel recorder.

1. Are some partnerships more effective in reaching the public health community than others? What are the effects of partnerships among different entities?
2. What are the benefits of partnerships? What are the

pitfalls of partnerships? What strategies can increase the likelihood of successful partnerships?

3. How do participants develop partnerships? How do they go beyond outreach to partnerships?

4. What strategies can be used to ensure sustainable outcomes? How is sustainability defined or measured? Can outcomes be sustained in the absence of a partnership?

INVITED SPEAKERS

Throughout the two days, invited speakers from the public health community gave presentations salient to the topics of the forum, from the perspective of the targets of the outreach efforts. They also introduced the audience to actual applications of knowledge in support of public health problems. The speakers and their topics are listed below. PowerPoint slides from the presentations can be viewed on the forum Website.

■ "HP2010: Managing Information to Help Achieve Our Nation's Health Objectives" by Ron Bialek, M.P.P., Public Health Foundation
■ "GIS Applications to Public Health and Demonstration of EpiQMS" by Richard Hoskins, Ph.D., Washington State Department of Health
■ "Health Alert Network and the Role of Information Management" by William Yasnoff, M.D., Ph.D., CDC
■ "Knowledge Management Training Options for the Public Health Workforce" by Nancy Allee, M.L.S., M.P.H., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and chair, Training Subcommittee, Partners in Information Access for Public Health Professionals
■ "The Status of Distance Learning in Public Health" by David Carney, M.P.H., Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

SUMMARY SESSIONS

Three other sessions, summary in nature, were also on the agenda for the second day. Rambo began with a "Summary of Lessons Learned: Reflection on Panel Reports." Later in the morning program, Zenan and Rankin conducted an interactive session with all attendees on the subject of questions or issues arising out of the forum that would be appropriate for further research. The third and final session was a forum wrap up on future directions for public health outreach efforts given by Angela Ruffin, NLM. Notes were taken on all three sessions and turned into PowerPoint slides.

THE AGENDA

The forum began with a welcome from NLM Director Donald A. B. Lindberg and a charge to the group from NLM Associate Director for Library Operations Betsy L. Humphreys. They were followed by the first speaker, Bialek, who gave the audience some concrete suggestions on how to connect public health outreach efforts to the goals of "Healthy People 2010." At the conclusion of Bialek's talk, Cahn gave a short introduction to how the concurrent discussion panels were to work. Audience members then had the option of attending either of the two panels. After the members reconvened, Henner and Rankin reviewed the results of their discussions using the PowerPoint slides prepared by their panel recorders.

After a lunch break, the second invited speaker, Hoskins, spoke about global information system (GIS) applications in public health and gave a fascinating demonstration of his Epidemiologic Query and Mapping System (EpiQMS). Participants then moved to concurrent Panel 3 and Panel 4 sessions, returning to hear Burroughs and Rambo review the results of their sessions. As in the morning session, they presented PowerPoint slides with their sessions' salient points highlighted. The day ended with a reception and time to look at posters and exhibits of twelve public health outreach projects.

The forum's second day began with Rambo reflecting on the four panel reports and summarizing the lessons learned. Yasnoff followed him and spoke about the evolution of CDC's Health Alert Network and the application of informatics to public health.

The second half of the morning session was given over to research and training. Zenan and Rankin led a short discussion with the attendees about potential research questions and issues. The steering committee hoped that some of the presented ideas would be the basis for proposals for funding by MLA, NLM, or others, so that the research base on outreach efforts could be expanded. To complete the morning, presenters Allee and Carney gave talks on training options and workforce training needs. The forum concluded in the afternoon with a wrap up of the two day's sessions and some potential future directions given by Ruffin.

CONCLUSION

The forum's attendees came away with a sense that the collaborative projects, for the most part, provided many states' public health professionals with timely, convenient access to information resources to help them do their jobs more efficiently and effectively and to improve the health of their citizenry. The attendees were also asked to provide thoughtful comments about the meeting via email. Here is a representative sample of those comments:

Really good meeting . . . bringing together the project leaders and representatives of the targeted group is very appealing.

Very useful to me . . . in the future, include a roundtable

event where eight to ten participants can share nitty-gritty details of what worked and didn't.

I especially enjoyed the presentation regarding EpiQMS . . . a valuable experience.

[O]pportunities to learn from those with experience, learned from the projects . . . chance to network.

The meeting was highly successful . . . opportunity to discuss the project with other project directors . . . hear what some of the public health information issues are from the organizations and professionals themselves.

[T]here should be meetings like this during the projects . . . perhaps an informal meeting during MLA.

Will this forum be an annual event?

There is still much to be done, however, especially in establishing more and stronger partnerships between academic institutions and public health agencies at the local level. The lessons learned at this forum give some guidance as to where future efforts might best be spent.

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