

Public Health Outreach Project Description

Title: Information Access for Public Health Professionals

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Organization: Southwest Georgia Area Health Education Center [SOWEGA-AHEC]

Date: May 1999 – October 2000 (Project dates: May 1999 – April 2001)

Objectives:

- 1) To assess the information needs of different segments of the public health professional workforce in Georgia Department of Public Health District 8-2, a 14-county jurisdiction comprised of county health departments, program offices and the district office.
- 2) Using the assessment, plan and develop on-site training interventions, develop and produce a training manual, and create a web-based directory of resources.
- 3) Provide library services including reference, literature searching, document delivery and loan of materials; set up Loansome Doc accounts for sites who wish to participate.

Target Audience:

All employees of Georgia Department of Public Health District 8-2 (a population of 450 persons), including public health nurses, environmental health specialists, county and program department directors, epidemiologists, and health educators.

Needs assessment (methodology and results):

A needs assessment survey was conducted for all employees of Public Health District 8-2. The survey form used was based on a template provided by the NN/LM in the RFP. The response rate was from this survey--just above 90%--can be attributed to strong support from the district director, with whom SOWEGA-AHEC has a long history of cooperation. The survey gathered information about public health employees' access to the Internet, and the frequency of their usage of resources such as the GDPH (Georgia Department of Public Health) site, the CDC web site and CDC Wonder, PubMed, Internet Grateful Med, and public health professional organizations' web sites. Results indicate that approximately two-thirds of the population never use any of the Internet resources listed on the survey, with the exception of the CDC web site; just over 50% of those surveyed never use the CDC site. These results indicate a significant need for awareness efforts and training by the SOWEGA-AHEC Outreach Librarian.

Intervention:

Site contacts have been designated at the district office and at each of the county health departments. A minimum of three visits to each site is being conducted. The initial visits will be made to conduct needs assessments. The remaining visits are hands-on training workshops in the use of Internet Grateful Med, PubMed, CDC web site and CDC Wonder, methods of requesting library

services, and informal "troubleshooting" sessions. At least one copy of the training manual will be delivered to each county department and the district office.

Training and other materials developed:

SOWEGA-AHEC's *Internet Access for Public Health Professionals Project Training Manual*, a loose-leaf manual containing training materials from NN/LM (Internet Grateful Med), from the Georgia Department of Public Health (GDPH Site material), from CDC (CDC Wonder), and developed by the SOWEGA-AHEC Outreach Librarian (PubMed, CDC web site, and an annotated list of web resources for public health professionals). Also included in the manual are templates for requesting documents and other materials, as well as database searches.

Website (developed as part of project and how maintained):

<www.sowega-ahec.org/phproject.html> Information about the project, including funding information, contact information for the project director, and other general information about the project.

<www.sowega-ahec.org/ph_links.html> A categorized, annotated, extensive listing of key public health websites.

Website maintenance is carried out by the SOWEGA-AHEC Outreach Librarian.

Evaluation (methodology and results):

A follow-up survey based on the needs-assessment survey (described above) will be conducted to assess the effectiveness of resource awareness and training interventions. This survey will be conducted near the end of the project, early in 2001.

Poster Sessions/Exhibits/Presentations/Publications:

Labeause J, McCarley L, Smith R. Jubilee in Georgia: Bringing a Feast to the Public Health Table. Poster session presented at the Southern Chapter of the Medical Library Association annual meeting, Mobile, AL, October 22, 2000.

Partnerships:

SOWEGA-AHEC has worked cooperatively with the Mercer University School of Medicine Library, which also received funding for a public health outreach project, to share information obtained via survey instruments. The Mercer Library project targets the entire state, while the SOWEGA project targets one district. Comparison of data gathered from each of these target populations serves to validate the findings of each institution.

Marketing:

We used the District 8-2 public health director's office to provide their backing for local participation in this project, including publicizing it through their electronic discussion list. This support helped produce an extremely high response rate on the initial needs assessment survey (discussed above), and has generated enthusiasm for the project among department and program directors. SOWEGA-AHEC's *Health Matters* newsletter, distributed to health professionals and interested laypersons through Georgia, has also carried news items about the project.

Administrative issues:

[E.g., oversight structure, staffing and support, unexpected costs, institutional barriers, scheduling difficulties]

This project was overseen by the SOWEGA-AHEC Center Director, and carried out by the Outreach Librarian with staff support from the AHEC. Strong support from the Director of Health District 8-2 provided leadership "buy in" and the incentive for participation among the target population.

Because the SOWEGA-AHEC Health Sciences Library is essentially a one-person operation, time to complete project objectives, particularly training efforts, are proceeding somewhat more slowly than expected. However, two group training seminars helped address this obstacle. Scheduling difficulties are discussed in the "Challenges Faced" section, below.

Challenges Faced:

- Because of the wide variation of Internet use skills among public health professionals, time in initial training visits must often be spent on basic navigation issues before training in specific resources can be effective.
- At times there were scheduling difficulties in arranging site visits for training. Training visits generally last 90 minutes or longer, and staff in county health departments are often heavily burdened with day-to-day duties; training visits usually had to be planned a month or more in advance.
- The Outreach Librarian accepted a position at Mercer University School of Medicine Library in September 2000; the project is scheduled to run through April 2001. While library services are still delivered to the target population via an agreement with Mercer, training visits have been curtailed until a new librarian is hired.

Were Project Objectives Met?

The process of assessing information needs was met, and resulted in a poster session (at the 2000 SC/MLA meeting) on the topic. The resources objectives were met to the extent of creating a web-based directory of resources as well as creating a training manual detailing the use of online resources. On-site training objectives are still in progress as of the date of this report.

Sustainability:

Two areas of sustainability are being addressed: the web pages providing an annotated list of resources for public health professionals will be maintained by the Outreach Librarian, who has overall responsibility for the SOWEGA-AHEC web site.

Continuation of library services (document delivery, loan of materials, research services) will be maintained by initiating a fee-for-services structure. Fees will be kept as low as possible, as the purpose is cost-recovery only. While these fees can be expected to cause some decrease in the use of library services, previous experience with initiating fees has shown that patrons will continue to use these services.

Anecdotes or Other Observations:

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