

Public Health Outreach Project Description

Title: Information Access for Public Health Professionals in North Dakota
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Organization: Harley E. French Library of the Health Sciences, University of North Dakota, School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Grand Forks, ND

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Objectives:

Goal: the purpose of this project is to provide public health professionals in the state of North Dakota with timely, convenient access to health care information resources.

- 1.) Identify the health care information needs of the public health professionals in the state of North Dakota.
- 2.) Inform public health professionals in North Dakota of the services available from the Harley E. French Library of the Health Sciences (HEF Library) and its three clinical campus libraries, the National Network of Libraries of Medicine-Greater Midwest Region, and the National Library of Medicine.
- 3.) Improve the level and quality of communication between the HEF Library and its clinical campus libraries and the public health professionals working in North Dakota.
- 4.) Instruct public health employees in the most efficient and productive access to healthcare services provided by the HEF Library and its clinical campus libraries, the National Network of Libraries of Medicine-Greater Midwest Region, and the National Library of Medicine.
- 5.) Improve the level and quality of communication between the reference desk at the HEF Library and public health practitioners of the state.
- 6.) Investigate the “information seeking process” in relation to public health professionals’ information seeking skills.
- 7.) Develop a plan for continued programming and services required to meet the health care information needs of public health professionals in North Dakota.

Target Audience:

All public health staff in the state of North Dakota.

Needs assessment (methodology and results):

The first step of the project was to further identify the health care information needs of the public health professionals in the state of North Dakota by obtaining input from them. Our first step was to distribute the Baseline Data form obtained from the NN/LM-GMR. We have also conducted a focus group in three of the four quadrants of the state. The focus groups have been conducted to determine the types of information services that might be useful to the public health employees with benefit of their input. We have found that our “perception” of their information needs was accurate; however, it was not complete.

We have specifically found that they are pleased to have instruction on access to reliable health care on the Internet; however, their access to the Internet is not at a level that makes this practical. We have also found that some of the “services” we are promoting through the project, such as Loansome Doc are not efficient or cost effective for them because of existing policies and procedures.

Intervention:

We continue to offer classes and have found that making the Internet site links we introduce in the classes available via the web site we established for the project seems to be a valued part of the project.

As a result of the focus groups we are in the process of working with the North Dakota State Library to change the lending procedure used with the North Dakota Department of Health. The current procedure does not allow them to use Loansome Doc at the same low cost as their existing procedure.

We are also finding that the email access point we set up is not always the easiest way for the public health personnel to reach us. With this in mind we are promoting the support that is available by calling the reference desk at any of the clinical campus libraries.

We have also found that statistical information unique to the state of North Dakota is important to this group. With that in mind we are developing a section of our project page that will link them to this type of data. This will provide them with the 1999 edition of the *Statistical Abstract of North Dakota*, which is only available electronically and the data center at North Dakota State University.

Training and other materials developed:

A four-hour class was developed on access to reliable health care information via the Internet. Application was made to the North Dakota Nurses Association for RNs to obtain Continuing Education credit by attending the class. We have developed a packet of handouts that are used for these training classes.

We have developed and distributed a brochure about the project. These have been distributed in mailings and at exhibits. We are also distributing a bookmark that directs them to the projects web site.

We also have a display board that is used at exhibits. The display provides information about the project, the four clinical campus libraries, the Greater Midwest Region – NNLM, and the National Library of Medicine.

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

A web site was also developed for the class.

<http://www.med.und.nodak.edu/depts/library/PubHealth/> can be accessed by going directly to the page or by following an outreach link on the initial page of the Harley French Library of the Health Sciences at <http://www.med.und.nodak.edu/depts/library/>. The links on the web site are

used during the teaching sessions and are then available as a follow-up resource. The site is also intended as an outreach resource to others who are not able to attend the class. The site is maintained with the assistance of the library's web master.

Evaluation (methodology and results):

Evaluation forms are collected following each class and the project librarians discuss the project and re-formulate objectives on a quarterly basis. The greatest impact on the project has come from the information gathered at the focus groups.

Poster Sessions/Exhibits/Presentations/Publications:

Plans are underway to submit a paper for the *Midwest Chapter of the Medical Library Association* meeting in 2001. There is also a research aspect of the paper aimed at determining the information access process for public health professionals. A separate paper is planned from this project. Plans are to submit the paper to the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association*.

Partnerships:

The project has given us the opportunity to dialog with each public health department in the state of North Dakota. This has meant the formation of a partnership between two public health offices and the northwest clinical campus (11 counties), five public health offices and the southwest clinical campus (18 counties), six public health offices and the northeast clinical campus (9 counties), and eleven public health offices and the southeast clinical campus (15 counties). The broader picture, of course, is that a partnership has been established between each of the public health offices and the Harley French Library of the Health Sciences, which continues to serve as both the resource library and the outreach library to health care professionals in the state of North Dakota.

Marketing:

We have marketed the project through a mailing to each of the public health offices announcing the project, distribution of materials to each of the public health offices, through a link on the library's web site and by exhibiting at meetings and conferences attended by public health personnel in North Dakota.

Administrative issues:

One of the greatest challenges are always time and personnel. At the beginning of the project we had one librarian who was new to health science libraries and we currently have one of our clinical campus positions open. However, we are quite fortunate that two of our librarians have done outreach in the state for five or more years and we are finding that there seems to be a low turnover rate in the public health personnel through out the state. This makes us feel like we are working on a project that is beginning and has the opportunity to adjust, to develop and to continue to grow.

Challenges Faced:

Our main challenge has been the level of computer hardware and level of connectivity available to the public health personnel through out the state. We have found that few of them have a “dedicated” computer to use for their day-to-day work. It is not unusual for them to “share” a computer. We have also found that electronic communicates are often redistributed in paper format.

It is difficult to convince people to attend a class to learn a skill that they will not be able to develop when they return to their work situation.

Another challenge is changes in personnel in the Public Health Departments as well. It is often the process of initiating and maintaining a relationship that makes this type of service work and continuing to work over a period of time.

We are fortunate that we have found a low level of turn over in the public health offices.

Were Project Objectives Met?

Yes, we are meeting the objective of the project: to provide public health professionals in the state of North Dakota with timely, convenient access to health care information resources.

We have not met all aspects as we had envisioned we might. However, we have set up a pattern of communication and are continuing to work towards the specific project objectives.

Sustainability:

While working on this project we have stressed that there is a contact person available in each of the four areas of the state. While stressing this “local” availability we have also stressed that there is more than one level of access available to them at any one time. We have let them know that the Harley French Library in Grand Forks is also available through a variety of means: their web site, their reference desk and as a back up to the clinical campus libraries. By stressing the local access to the clinical campus libraries in each quadrant of the state we are increasing our chances of being able to sustain the project. The availability of services via our web site also greatly enhances our ability to assist all of the public health employees on a continuous basis.

Anecdotes or Other Observations: