The Northern Plains Consortium Emerging Leaders Program

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Abstract

The Northern Plains Consortium (NPC), comprised of state public health agencies from Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming, implemented an Emerging Leaders Program (ELP) modeled after the Association of Public Health Laboratories' ELP. For its inaugural year, the NPC ELP followed a set curriculum based on training in key aspects of being a successful public health leader, with focus in the state public health laboratory. There were eight participants from all five states, with backgrounds in epidemiology, laboratory bench work, and management. Program activities included:

- Webinars given by NPC state public health lab directors and managers on topics such as fiscal management, strategic planning, and legislative processes and regulations
- In-person meetings involving exercises such as developing management character profiles, creating and writing a grant in one hour, and participating in mock media interviews on public health issues
- Visits to NPC state public health laboratories to study their organization and role in providing quality public health services

ELP members also participated in a team project on the impact of culture-independent diagnostic testing (CIDT) on public health surveillance, with outputs including:

- Results of a hospital survey on CIDT versus culture testing and sample submission to the state lab
- An analysis of state reported diseases over a six year period on pathogens that can be tested by CIDT

Finally, participants gave perspectives on the strengths and suggested improvements to the NPC ELP. The NPC plans to continue the development of qualified leaders to work effectively in the niche of the public health laboratory and related agencies by facilitating a second cohort of this program.

ACTIVITIES

Webinars

- Legislative Process and Regulations
- Fiscal Management
- Strategic Planning
- The Power of Networking, Outreach, and Partnerships

In-Person Exercises

- Team Management System Profile
- Grant Writing
- Mock Media Interview and Review
- The Power of Asking Questions
- Group Book Review on Leadership

State Lab Visits – Highlights

Montana

- Sample accessioning electronic process
- Biothreat transport kits
- Disease group meeting
- Infographics use

Idaho

- SharePoint use as a document control system
- Lab tour posters in halls
- Biosafety placarding
- LIMS overview

Colorado

- Visited during NPC in-person meeting in Denver
- Molecular science program
- Newborn screening program
- Radiochemistry program

TEAM PROJECT

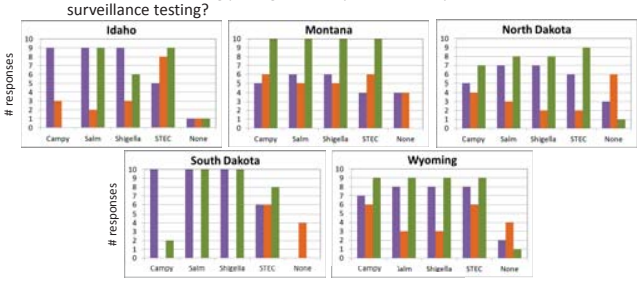
Brainstorming Ideas

- Internal audit checklist
- Shared services assessment
- NPC quarterly bulletin
- Workforce development
- Competency assessment template
- Quality management assessment

FINAL CHOICE: Impact of enteric bacteria culture-independent diagnostic testing (CIDT) on public health surveillance

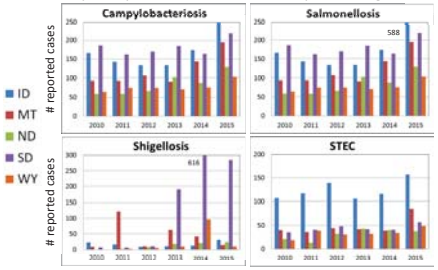
10 hospitals were surveyed in each state:

- Q1 Which of the following pathogens does your laboratory culture?
- Q2 Which of the following pathogens does your laboratory perform CIDT?
- Q3 Which of the following pathogens does your laboratory send to the state lab for surveillance testing?

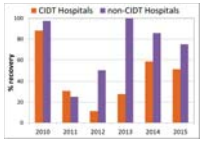


Reported Diseases 2010-2015

- ELP participants worked with state epidemiologists to collect data (2015 preliminary).



Wyoming State Lab: % Culture Recovery from Submitted Specimens



Discussion

- CIDT impact on the number of culture-confirmed reported diseases is not yet evident.
- It is hypothesized that CIDT increase in clinical labs will:
  - Decrease the number of surveillance sample submissions to the state lab.
    - Reasons stated by surveyed hospitals include cost, staffing, and time.
    - Only MT and ND in the NPC have state rules on mandatory sample submission.
  - Decrease the viability of culture recovery from specimens sent to the state lab.
    - Poor CIDT storage conditions and delayed receipt at state lab will contribute.
- Due to different Laboratory Information Management Systems (LIMS) capabilities in the NPC state labs, data mining on sample submission and culture viability was difficult.

PROGRAM PERSPECTIVES

Strengths

- "Not only has the Emerging Leaders Program helped me develop my skills as a leader in the laboratory, it also has afforded me the opportunity to develop life-long professional relationships with other public health colleagues in surrounding states. That opportunity transcends not only for the year, but for many years following, giving all of us a professional database from which we can draw knowledge, experience, and answers."
- "What I liked most about the NPC ELP was the opportunity to travel and actually see how each laboratory was structured differently."
- "A highlight of the program was seeing many of the participants take stronger leadership roles or be promoted in their workplace."
- "The networking experience between the NPC ELP cohort members was invaluable to me as a new member of the management team."
- "Our Emerging Leader was an excellent employee before the program and even better after completion!"

Concerns/Recommendations

- "It was hard to coordinate the team project among everyone with few in-person discussions as well as juggling time constraints and work obligations."
- "I was hoping for more personal stories and helpful words of wisdom from those who have been through these specific leadership situations – i.e., learning from their experiences."
- "We have small numbers of laboratory staff and the absence of our Emerging Leader was felt in the laboratory while she was away at the in-person meetings."
- "Continuing support from upper management is essential to the success of an ELP."
- "Self-driven group projects require up-front structure and planning in order to be successful."

Conclusions

- The NPC Emerging Leaders Program provided opportunities in leadership growth through training tools such as webinars, exercises, and state lab visits.
- There is great value through the ELP in building professional relationships and networking opportunities between public health laboratories.
- Project challenges exist when working between five states with five different state structures/LIMS/interdepartmental relationships.

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