

38th PIHOA Meeting

The 38th PIHOA meeting took place in Yap 19–23 September, 2004. The PPHSN Coordinating Body focal point was invited to the meeting's open sessions and was represented by the communicable disease surveillance specialist.

It was an interesting meeting in that it looked at PIHOA's strategic future. The first three days were closed sessions, which largely worked on the strategic planning document and implementation. The last two days were open sessions.

The first day of the open sessions saw presentations and updates from various associations and organisations actively operating or supporting activities in the American-associated Pacific Islands;

- Pacific Basin Medical Association
- Pacific Basin Dental association
- University of Guam HLATTE PROJECT
- Pacific Islands Primary Care Association (PIPCA) – a new development
- Department of Interior
- HRSA initiatives and activities in the Pacific basin
- CDC counsel and advice
- Region IX.

Of the newer developments and very interesting, was the formation of PIPCA. PIPCA focuses on developing systems of primary care, is interdisciplinary, supports practitioners and has been initiated from the Pacific basin health leadership. The mission of PIPCA is to promote and support quality Pacific Islands primary health Care for all member islands. Its goals are:

- to expand and improve primary care systems specific to local needs;
- to advocate for local and regional health care issues to expand and improve integrated systems of care;
- to appropriately build and sustain local and regional capacity; and
- to develop and support a system for collaborating and networking.

The second day of the open sessions focused on many interesting training programmes and included presentations from:

- Pacific Basin AHEC programmes, Palau, Marshall Islands and Yap
- Pacific Association for Clinical Training
- Pacific Resource for Education and Learning
- PEACESAT presentation
- Pacific Island TB Control Association and lab shipping update
- Regional Bioterrorism Grant activities including the Data for Decision Making (DDM) training
- Fiji School of Medicine
- PPHSN.

A CDC presentation on tobacco, prevention and control, was also given and a resolution urging ratification of the framework convention on tobacco control was discussed in closed session. A presentation about PPHSN and SPC Public Health Programme and activities was also given. The highlight of day two was the new format of training for the Data for Decision Making (DDM) course, allowing training to occur in the various countries of the American-associated Pacific Islands. This would benefit many more candidates in each country and it would be cheaper to undertake.

The overall goal of this series of training is to build epidemiologic capacity in the Pacific. The courses offered in this training are intended as building blocks, with strong field component (experience and practical), toward a more advanced level of training and qualification from an accrediting institution, in this case the Fiji School of Medicine and perhaps others. So candidates could end up with certificates, diplomas or even masters or PhD degrees. It is hoped that heads of Health Ministries of the region would choose appropriate health professionals for this training, such as those who are responsible for outbreak surveillance, investigations and control, from various health disciplines, especially EpiNet team members, and even others who are interested and would like to work in similar areas.

From the PPHSN point of view, this is a significant move forward and PIHOA including Dr Michael O'Leary are to be congratulated. We as the PPHSN-CB focal point are also keen to play an important role in collaboration with PIHOA and various institutions in the region, especially the Fiji School of Medicine.

Details on the meeting could be obtained from PIHOA secretariat (contact: pihoa@hawaii.edu).

Dr Narendra Singh
Communicable Disease Surveillance Specialist
SPC