

Developing LabNet in the US Pacific

“*Developing LabNet in the US Pacific*” was the theme of a successful workshop in Guam on 4–5 February 2005. Over 60 laboratory technologists and technicians from the six US affiliated Pacific Islands (USAPI) gathered to implement the LabNet network concept in their region.

The meeting was the outcome of a 2003 initiative of the Board of Directors of the Pacific Island Health Officers Association (PIHOA). The aim was to organise the public health laboratory services in the USAPI into a regional network for the PPHSN target diseases: cholera, typhoid, influenza, dengue, leptospirosis, measles, rubella, HIV and selected sexually transmitted infections (STI), and agents of bioterrorism. Tuberculosis is also amongst the targets of the regional public health laboratory services in the Northern part of the region.

The workshop was organised by Dr Michael O’Leary, CDC/NCID Regional Epidemiologist, whose diligence has made this workshop a success and for which he is to be congratulated.

The seven objectives of this LabNet workshop were to:

- describe the structure and function of LabNet;
- understand the capacities and services of the Guam Public Health Laboratory;
- agree on the scope of work expected at L1 and L2 laboratories in the USAPI;
- share technical information on test kits and strategies;
- develop plans for specimen shipping protocols;
- understand the function and use of the revolving fund; and
- establish a communications network among all participating laboratories.

Participants included laboratory staff from nine Level 1 laboratories, namely American Samoa, the four L1 laboratories in the Federated States of Micronesia (Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei and Yap), Palau, the Majuro and Ebeye laboratories in the Marshall Islands, and Saipan. Also present were staff from the Level 2 laboratory in Guam at the Department of Public Health Diagnostic Laboratory Services (DLS), and representatives from the Naval Hospital Laboratory and Guam Memorial Hospital. They were joined by resource personnel from CDC, Atlanta, from PPHSN and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) in New Caledonia, Pacific Paramedical Training Centre (PPTC) in New Zealand and State Laboratories of the Hawaii and California Departments of Health.

The welcome by Ms Cindy Naval on behalf of Mr Peter John Camacho, the Guam Director of Public Health and Social Services, was followed by opening remarks from Mr Bill McMillan, Administrator of Guam Memorial Hospital, Dr Devery Howerton of the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, and Dr Jeff Barcinas, the Vice President for University and Community Engagement of the University of Guam.

At the end of this two-day meeting it was agreed that the regional laboratory services networking between L1 laboratories and Guam Public Health Laboratory (L2) would proceed, with the new Regional Laboratory Co-ordinator being the liaison for regional laboratory activities. Other activities planned for the next six months include a training needs assessment for each laboratory, finalisation of regional and local shipping protocols, development of standard operating procedure for the revolving fund, introduction and implementation of additional testing methods at L1 laboratories, consideration of standardisation of selected test kits, supplies and equipment, finalisation of network communication protocols and support for communications where needed.

In addition to the LabNet workshop agenda, two concurrent supplementary meetings on STD and HIV testing and on special topics in tuberculosis also took place.

HazMat Training Course

Prior to the LabNet workshop, a training course on packing and shipping infectious and diagnostic specimens as hazardous material (HazMat) or dangerous goods was conducted by Tom Goob from Diagnostic Laboratory Services, Hawaii, and Subroto Banerji from CDC on 2–3 February. 20 participants attended this training course, some attending for re-certification as well as others attending for the first time.

Laboratory Quality Systems Workshop

After the LabNet workshop a workshop for laboratory supervisors and managers on “Building Laboratory Quality Systems”, organised by Dr Devery Howerton, National Center for Health Marketing, CDC, was held 7–9 February. Dr Howerton’s commendable effort in putting together such an exciting, educational and informative workshop is worthy of compliment.

The facilitators for these sessions included Dr Devery Howerton, Dr Paul Kimsey (California State Lab), John Elliot (PPTC), Susan Naka (Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments Program), Rebecca Sciulli (Hawaii State Laboratory), Albert Gurusamy (Saipan) and Vasiti Uluiviti (PIHOA).

The workshop content included major topics encompassed in the Laboratory Quality Assurance Cycle of the Pre-Analytic, Analytic and Post Analytic phases. These included Organisational Responsibilities, Laboratory Documentation and Records, Equipment Management, Purchasing and Inventory, Specimen Management, Analytic Process Control (Qualitative and Quantitative QC), External and Internal Laboratory Assessments, Personnel Management and Facilities and Safety.

At the end of the three-day workshop, each laboratory team identified deficient areas of Quality Assurance Systems in their own laboratories and drafted a plan of specific improvement activities for the next 6 months. The Regional Laboratory Co-ordinator will follow up on these activities and report on each laboratory’s progress.

Funding

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