

North Pacific lab managers addressing trends in healthcare

'Lab managers – creating solutions to today's problems' was the theme of the third Pacific Islands Health Officers Association (PIHOA) Regional Laboratory Network and Association of US Affiliated Pacific Island (USAPI) Laboratories meeting that took place in Guam from 30 May to 2 June 2011.

The theme reflects the need to have effective leadership in the laboratory environment in order to respond effectively to trends in healthcare.

Dr Eric Blank, Director for Public Health Systems at the Association of Public Health Laboratories, highlighted the importance of leadership in the laboratory in his keynote address. Dr Blank also emphasised that the uniqueness of the Pacific is a challenge itself and that all challenges should be addressed in the social and cultural context of Pacific Islands.

The meeting included presentations from USAPI laboratory managers, focusing on their challenges and needs. These included:

- funding to support:
 - ✓ reagent/equipment purchase at local capacity level;
 - ✓ reagent purchase and shipping expenses for regional laboratory testing at Guam Public Health Laboratory for influenza, dengue fever, leptospirosis, measles, mumps, typhoid and cholera;
 - ✓ sustenance of the PIHOA Revolving Fund to support testing and shipping at sub-regional level.
- training and/or education of laboratory staff on:
 - ✓ laboratory quality management systems;
 - ✓ microbiology;
 - ✓ morgue procedures /embalming;
 - ✓ histology and cytology;
 - ✓ phlebotomy.
- implementation of laboratory quality management systems:
 - ✓ development of national laboratory policies and standards;
 - ✓ technical assistance to develop or improve documents and records.

Two days of the meeting were dedicated to the training of the USAPI laboratory managers and hospital administrators on quality laboratory management systems, focusing on five system essentials: assessment, personnel, equipment, purchase and inventory, and documents and records.



Hospital administrators from the ten US-affiliated Pacific states in the northern Pacific were invited to the meeting, along with laboratory managers and representatives from partner organisations: Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization, the Fiji School of Medicine, the Pacific Paramedical Training Center (PPTC), the Hawaii State Laboratory Division and US Navy Medical Research Units.

There were thirty-six participants altogether, as well as a few who participated via teleconference. It was a good opportunity to strengthen the PIHOA laboratory network through collaboration and exchange of information between the laboratories and the partner organisations/institutions.

At the opening of the workshop, James Gillan, Director of the Guam Department of Public Health and Social Services, emphasised that collaboration was needed among the USAPI jurisdictions to help Guam Public Health Laboratory achieve level two testing capacity, as this initiative would also help laboratories in the USAPI region.

The partners updated the USAPI officials on their regional initiatives: PIHOA's three initiatives on laboratory, human resources for health and quality assurance; the Hawaii State Laboratory virologic surveillance project in the USAPI; and current activities of the PPHSN laboratory network (LabNet) for infectious diseases, including the ongoing initiative to build the capacity of Pacific Islands to conduct laboratory surveillance of influenza and develop sustainable influenza networks in the region, coordinated by SPC.

The last day of the workshop was dedicated to the Association of USAPI Laboratories and ended with a number of resolutions, including:

- i. the adoption of the WHO Pacific Regional Laboratory Standards as the standards for endorsement by the hospitals/health administrations in the freely-associated states of the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and Marshall Islands;
- ii. recognition of the PPTC Diploma in Medical Technology (or equivalent) as the minimum level of qualification to be acquired by any laboratory staff member working in USAPI medical/clinical or public health laboratories.

A full report of this meeting is available upon request from the PIHOA website www.pihoa.org

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