

Development and Implementation of a Pilot Competency Course for New Local Public Health Administrators

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Description of the Project, Development, Outcomes:

In order to enhance the public health workforce in Iowa, the College of Public Health Institute for Public Health Practice entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with a statewide public health practice-based, non-profit organization, the Iowa Association of Local Public Health Agencies (I-ALPHA). I-ALPHA represents more than 42 local public health agencies responsible for provision of public health services in their respective counties. I-ALPHA has contracted with a Public Health Consultant to implement the activities identified in the MOU, including public health workforce development.

One of the priorities identified by I-ALPHA was developing the knowledge, skills and abilities of new public health administrators (those who have less than three years of experience). To assess the specific needs of new public health administrators, the Institute conducted several focus groups with both established and new public health administrators. From these focus groups specific topics were identified and a practice-based non-academic course for new public health administrators was developed. The goal of the New Public Health Administrator Competency Course is to provide an introduction into public health that will cover timely and relevant topics for Public Health Directors, Administrators or Nurse Administrators who are either new in their position or seek additional skills and knowledge in the field of public health.

This 4 month program includes approximately 25 hours of instruction including modules on leadership, strategic planning, financial management, communications skills, human resources, and public health law. The sessions are delivered in multiple modalities including face-to-face and distance learning. The first 6 sessions are approximately two hours in length and delivered via the Iowa Communications Network (ICN) and the Internet. The remainder of the program takes place during a two-day face-to-face "Learning Institute" session. Each participant receives a Certificate of completion.

The course is led by a team consisting of faculty from the College of Public Health and local public health practitioners from Iowa. Participants in the course assessed themselves on the core public health competencies utilizing the Institute's learning management system. They will reassess themselves at the end of the program. It should be noted that this course will be online in the fall of 2004.

Successes, Difficulties, and "The Unexpected"

Available slots in the pilot program were quickly filled, which was somewhat unexpected given the busy schedules of the public health administrators. In addition, the practitioner faculty has been enthusiastic about the project and willing to participate. The difficulties encountered have revolved around distance learning technologies, specifically the need to access WebCT online and ensuring that participants complete the quizzes and the evaluations for each session on-line.

Benefits to the Agency and the Community Served by the Agency

I-ALPHA benefits from this project by demonstrating that it is taking a leadership and collaborative role to improve the public health workforce in Iowa. It is providing a service to local public health agencies that they themselves are unable to provide, i.e. subject matter that they need in their day-to-day operations in their administrative role.