

Training/EpiNet team capacity building on the agenda of the 17th PPHSN Coordinating Body meeting



Training in field epidemiology and the establishment of a regional EpiNet team were among the key issues discussed at the 17th meeting of the PPHSN Coordinating Body (CB), which took place in Suva, Fiji Islands, at the same time (1–4 November 2010) as the regional workshop LabNet 2010.

Training/EpiNet team capacity building

Training in field epidemiology was highlighted at the last PPHSN-CB meeting, when representatives from the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Fiji School of Medicine gave brief presentations about current field epidemiology training courses available

through their programmes.

At the 17th PPHSN CB meeting, a special session was dedicated to this subject and some country representatives were in favour of basic courses (e.g. WHO's Introduction to Disease Surveillance and Outbreak Investigation course available online through the Pacific Open Learning Health Net) and others of advanced courses (e.g. Data for Decision Making (DDM) courses, see article in this issue).

The CB members thought that both types of course (basic and advanced) may be needed and that they could complement each other. A Training Technical Working Group was formed and tasked with evaluating current courses, reviewing a concept paper developed by SPC entitled A Pacific Model for DDM Training in consultation with Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs), and exploring the possibilities for obtaining sustainable funding.

Regional EpiNet Team (RET)

The idea of establishing a RET originally came from the PPHSN-CB and was recommended by Ministers of Health at the WHO/SPC Regional Ministerial Meeting in Samoa in 2005. In 2007, however, there was a request from WHO to take into account the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network decentralisation and to avoid duplication, so the concept of establishing a RET was shelved. However, it came back on the agenda of the PPHSN-CB meeting in 2008 with the following recommendation:

A regional, interagency/intergovernmental group of trainers as well as regional resources for outbreak investigation should be identified using available information (e.g. Directory of PPHSN Resources). This group would also help support outbreak investigations and response training, and serve as the 'Regional EpiNet Team'.

All CB members agreed with this recommendation, and stressed that the RET should have a specific focus on training. It was also mentioned that the RET should, if possible, primarily train national EpiNet teams and additional health professionals from the region, with the approval of the country concerned.

CB members requested that SPC develop a framework for the establishment of a RET, including operating procedures and protocols that respect PICTs' sovereignty. The framework should highlight the fact that an RET will increase/optimize training opportunities for Pacific health professionals and therefore contribute to PICTs' outbreak investigation capacity-building.

Beside the sessions above-mentioned, other issues were also discussed:

- **Renewal of allied members within CB:** The seat of the Pasteur Institute of New Caledonia within the CB was renewed for another three years and CB members requested that SPC work on draft criteria for the selection/renewal of allied members by the next meeting.
- **Potential allied members:** Several institutions and networks had sent letters to SPC expressing their interest in becoming PPHSN allied members, and CB members suggested that SPC contact them to explore their interest in becoming an allied member of the PPHSN and give a clear explanation of the conditions. Current allied members will also be contacted to confirm their interest in staying allied members..
- **Surveillance advancements:** At their previous meeting, CB members expressed their support for standardisation of surveillance and regional information sharing. At this meeting, the WHO and SPC representatives mentioned that a major step had been reached in terms of standardisation of surveillance with the standard syndromic surveillance system that was endorsed by all PICTs in March 2010. The meeting was a good opportunity to discuss progress of the implementation of this new system. Country representatives also mentioned that they were interested in the results of the PacSurv system trial in Cook Islands.
- **PRIPPP and post-project:** The meeting was reminded that PPHSN-CB has a role in monitoring the Pacific Regional Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Project (PRIPPP) since its inception in 2006. The PRIPPP coordinator presented an update of the activities planned until the end of the project (in June 2011) and she talked about a possible successor programme that should maintain the collaboration between human and animal health sectors. The One Health concept was also discussed.
- **Communication among countries before CB meetings:** A new process meant to facilitate communications among PPHSN core members (countries) before CB meetings was suggested at the last meeting. The new process, which was trialled for this meeting, will be maintained and even intensified before future meetings.
- **PPHSN-CB terms of reference and PPHSN Strategic Framework:** CB members reviewed the PPHSN-CB terms of reference and made some amendments to clarify its advocacy role and functions. They also worked on an update of the strategic framework.
- **Next meeting:** CB members agreed that the next PPHSN-CB meeting should be organised before the Ministers of Health meeting in June/July 2011) and once the Training Technical Working Group had finalised the review of the training concept paper (i.e. between April and June 2011). Mrs Lourdes Duguies, Chair of the meeting, mentioned that Guam is considering the possibility of hosting the next meeting.

Complete minutes and recommendations from the meeting can be consulted on PPHSN website:
http://www.spc.int/phs/PPHSN/Meetings/CB/17th_PPHSN-CB_meeting.htm