

California Tuberculosis Epidemiologists Network Overview (5/13/05)

Problem Statement: Epidemiologists are not fully at the table in local TB control, and local TB control programs may not appropriately utilize their skills and benefit from their capacities.

Goals of TB Epidemiologists Network (TEN): Build and maintain a network of TB epidemiologists to enhance TB surveillance, TB research, and evaluation of TB control and prevention efforts in California

Objectives

- Build capacity of TB epidemiologists (epidemiologists with TB responsibilities)
- Promote appropriate utilization of TB epidemiology capacity by local health departments
- Enhance collaboration between local-local and local-state epidemiologists in TB control

Activities of TB Epidemiologists Network

- 4 meetings since 4/03, with meeting on 5/13/05 the fifth
- Average participation = 30 per meeting
- Participation on-site, teleconference, and video conference; 5/13 meeting will include web conferencing
- Meeting content: presentations of research and epidemiologic methods, problem solving, discussion
- Launched Yahoo site for group: http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/tb_epi_network/
- Formation of 2 workgroups with focus on
 1. TB reports (developed minimum recommendations for content of TB reports)
 2. TB epidemiologic capacity/utilization in LHJs (conducted survey, considering interventions)

Issues Regarding Local TB Epidemiology Capacity and Utilization

- *Utilization*
 - Skills may not be fully and appropriately utilized (e.g., data entry; epidemiologist involved at last minute for data analysis only, rather than from beginning to help shape research questions and methods)
 - Little focus on program advocacy, transmission dynamics
- *Capacity:* programs may have insufficient epidemiology resources for TB morbidity; epidemiologists may not have adequate knowledge of TB
- *Barriers:* most epidemiologists are outside TB program organizationally and not well-integrated into TB program; TB controllers and program managers may not understand how to use and access epidemiologists; TB program culture may not be sufficiently open to including epidemiologists on the TB team; significant turnover of local epidemiologists

Potential Action Items for Local TB Controllers and TB Epidemiologists Network

- TC Assess TB program needs for epidemiology resources, utilization, and barriers (TC = TB Controller)
- TC Identify program needs requiring epidemiologist participation from start to finish and pursue (e.g., use genotyping and patient/epidemiologic data to identify/confirm outbreaks, evaluate CI effectiveness and assess interventions, develop systems to monitor patient improvement on treatment)
- TC Ensure that epidemiologists receive TB 101 training to maximize potential of epidemiology resources
- TC Develop/implement strategies for TB epidemiologists to become more integrated into CTCA (would require funding for travel to CTCA; lack of funding is significant barrier to participation)
- TEN Develop a sample tiered duty statement for TB epidemiologist corresponding to TB morbidity and %FTE; TB Epidemiologists Network presents to CTCA; local epidemiologist presents to local TB management
- TEN Develop Epi 101; local epidemiologist presents to TB program staff

Discussion

1. Is your TB program getting the most from its TB epidemiologist? If not, why not?
2. How should the barriers to better utilization of TB epidemiologists be addressed by local programs?
3. How should CTCA assist in enhancing local capacity and utilization of TB epidemiologists?
4. Should building local epidemiologic capacity and facilitating appropriate utilization of TB epidemiology resources be priorities for CTCA?

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