

Data Blasters: Wireless Training for the Public Health Workforce

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Executive Summary

Assuring a competent public health workforce in today's fact-paced and ever-changing environment has become an increasingly difficult task. Training efforts to improve the knowledge and skills of public health workers face many obstacles. There are financial constraints and work-related constraints on both sides of the training equation: those who provide the training and those who receive the training. Our Change Master team focused on adding an additional option to the current training mix that would be beneficial to both groups; and hopefully, would be more efficient and effective at meeting the true training need.

Our project began as a continuation of the "Training Wheels" project from one of last year's KPHLI Change Master groups. The idea was to create a mobile learning center that would travel to local health departments to provide hands-on training. The mobile lab would consist of computer workstations where employees could receive small-group classroom-style training specific to their need.

Our Change Master team set out to promote and coordinate the "Training Wheels" initiative with a desire of successfully implementing a program that would result in a better-trained public health workforce.

Data Blasters: Wireless Training for the Public Health Workforce

Introduction/Background

Public health workers in Kentucky need adequate training to continue to provide the quality services needed by our local communities. In recent years, more-and-more demands have been placed on public health employees. Local health departments and other public health agencies are required to have better plans and to be better prepared for dealing with all types of disasters and emergencies: especially those emergencies and disasters that relate to bio-terrorism and other terrorist threats. Local health departments and other public health agencies are seeing increased demand for services by a growing non-English speaking population. State and Federal agencies are continually changing guidelines and reporting requirements for the different programs that the local agencies offer. Combine all these pressures with the current budgetary problems that local agencies face and you can see that a well-trained competent public health workforce is essential in today's environment.

Project Description

Our Change Master project began with a focus on advancing the "Training Wheels" program started by a previous KPHLI group. Our first effort was to review and digest the materials assembled by our predecessors. Our next effort was to develop a strategy to 1) identify a specific training need, 2) coordinate a training plan with the appropriate agencies involved, 3) develop training materials that would fit the delivery format and 4) successfully deliver the coordinated training effort to a local health department.

Over the course of the year, our Change Master team became involved with and excited about a new technology that had enormous training potential. The new technology involves an ongoing partnership with Kentucky Educational Television (KET) that allows public health the opportunity to transmit digital data over the KET wireless network. Training videos or other digital materials could be broadcast over the KET network by utilizing their unused bandwidth. The transmitted materials could then be received by local public health agencies via a digital antenna and downloaded to a computer. The transmitted data could be viewed at any time and stored for repeat viewing. Because of the versatility and flexibility of this technology, our Change Master team opted to change focus from the mobile training option to the wireless digital training option. And although our vision shifted from one method to another, our strategy to successfully deliver a coordinated training effort to a local health department remained the same.

Data Blasters: Wireless Training for the Public Health Workforce

Objectives/Methodology

Our Change Master project objectives were:

1. Confirm the cooperative partnership with KET and their willingness to successfully promote the wireless digital transmission technology.
2. Run a minor test of the technology to see if adjustments need to be made.
3. Have a joint meeting with KET and the state training branch to further explore potential uses and gauge interest from both parties.
4. Deliver a test training video to KET, have it converted to a digital format for transmission, allow KET to broadcast the data and successfully download the broadcast at a local health department.
5. Establish funding (approximately \$300 per health department) to pay for antennas and digital receivers.
6. Promote the use of the technology by demonstrating its capabilities at the KPHLI graduation ceremony and other forums, as they become available.

Essential Public Health Services

#8: Assure a competent public health workforce. The use of wireless digital transmissions for training purposes is a practical solution to many of the training obstacles faced by public health today. Relevant and timely information can be easily shared through this media. If utilized properly, this technology will give Kentucky's public health workforce an advantage in today's face-paced ever-changing work environment.

Data Blasters: Wireless Training for the Public Health Workforce

Results

Meetings with KET and the Department for Public Health Training Branch showed much promise. All groups involved were interested in the development and promotion of the wireless technology. Subsequently, a test transmission of weather map data from KET was successfully downloaded inside the home of one of our team members.

At the time of this writing (one month before graduation), a makeshift training video had been filmed at the Madison County Health Department. The film will be delivered to KET and our team will attempt to download the transmission at the health department prior to graduation. The results of this download attempt will be presented at the graduation ceremony.

Conclusion

The technology made available through the KET wireless network offers tremendous potential for public health. Not only can the medium be used for training, it can be used as a backup to the Kentucky health alert network. As public health agencies begin to utilize this technology, we are confident that other innovative uses will be discovered.

We are certain that public health will reap great dividends from fostering its relationship with KET. The willingness of KET to be a good corporate citizen to the state of Kentucky and a good corporate citizen to public health deserves proper recognition and commendation. Their effort in developing a custom user interface for this technology specific to public health is well noted and appreciated.

We are confident that this project will have far reaching impact on the future of public health education and training.

Data Blasters: Wireless Training for the Public Health Workforce

Leadership Development Opportunities

David A. Reed

KPHLI has been a challenging and rewarding experience for me. Being relatively new to public health, I have faced many uncertainties in my role at the Madison County Health Department. The knowledge learned and the experience gained through interaction with other public health employees from around the state at KPHLI has given me more confidence to perform my job. I am grateful to my Director and to those responsible for overseeing the KPHLI program for this opportunity.

The project was both exciting at times and a burden at times. Overcoming obstacles was the most rewarding part of our project. It will be interesting to see the progression and utilization of the digital data transmission technology.

Mark A. Vaughn

When I began working in Public Health in 2001, the primary task at hand was the statewide network connection of all the health departments.

While working with the individual health departments, it became obvious that although the technology had been deployed, the relationships had not been developed in order to truly solve the problems. (We IT people sometimes forget that technology is just a tool – not the end result.) I realized then that our biggest challenge was *NOT* the technology, but the building of trust relationships between the State and Locals.

Through participating as a mentor in the Training Wheels project, I began to see KPHLI as a mechanism to bring people and technology together as a TEAM. As a participant in KPHLI, I have learned that the Public Health workforce is compassionate, caring and passionately committed to the health and welfare of Kentucky's citizens. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with such great people and for the knowledge I have gained that will serve me in all aspects of my career.