

Public Health Summer Academy (PHSA):

A Model Public Health Workforce Development Program,

University of Tennessee, Knoxville & East Tennessee Regional Office

Report for John J. Dreyzehner, MD, Tennessee Department of Health Commissioner

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Public Health Summer Academy (PHSA)

Program: Sixteen East Tennessee Regional Office (ETR) employees from eight counties plus the Regional Office participated in the Public Health Summer Academy (PHSA) July 23-27, 2012. The PHSA included 20 hours of educational sessions (Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to noon each day) in the core disciplines of public health, plus program evaluation. The PHSA was collaboratively planned by employees from ETR and the University of Tennessee (UT) Department of Public Health, and funded by East Tennessee State University's Public Health Training Center. Four UT Public Health faculty taught the sessions, and the UT Department Head, a former ETR director, facilitated discussions relevant to ETR at the end of each session. Reasons employees enrolled included: to increase knowledge of public health (63%), considering an MPH (44%), benefit their job (38%), improve skills (31%), and impact local community (25%). Participants were required to write a 3-4 page reflection paper 1 month later on how PHSA will improve their job.

Evaluation was highly positive; 100% of participants plan to recommend PHSA to colleagues. According to participants' reflection papers, the most common knowledge and skill applications included:

- understanding values and beliefs in order to change behaviors;
- identifying how environment affects health and health affects environment;
- interpreting health data related to program planning/assessment (prioritizing use of

Added Value to LHDs

County Director's View

Two months after the PHSA, a County Director observed, "Nutritionists are stronger advocates for the SMART process (specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, time and resource constrained) amongst their peers, as opposed to something they dread."

Participant's Feedback

Participants said an unexpected benefit was getting to know each other's roles and perspectives, building relationships with people they wouldn't normally interact with.

"This week has been an ah-hah moment and affirmation about why I do what I do and how I can improve. It encouraged me to probably go back to school. "

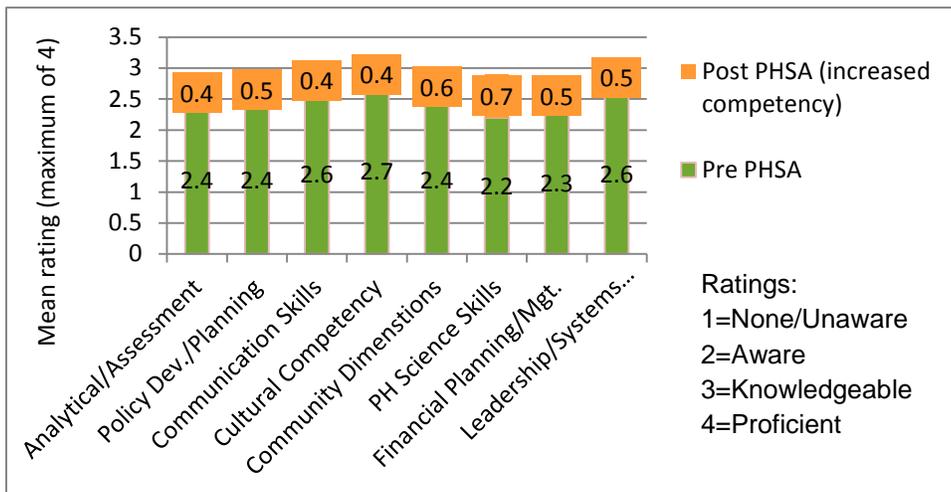
"It has given me a fresh set of eyes to not only see our clients and patients and co-workers differently, but has allowed me to become a better employee, supervisor and contributor in my own community."

"This skill will be useful in compiling information for small grants in my community."

- resources, identifying risk factors, targeting populations);
- dealing with change (policy, procedures, ACA);
- determining evaluation method and metrics of success when planning programs (including SMART objectives (specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, time and resource constrained), justifying existence, quality improvement).

Pre and Post PH Competency Assessments show the average rating increased for all competencies by 0.4-0.7, indicating that group average moved from “aware” toward “knowledgeable” (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Average Rating for Pre and Post Competencies



Assessment tool: http://www.phf.org/resourcestools/Documents/Competency_Assessment_Tier1_2012Jan.pdf

Favorite aspects: Participants suggested continuing the week-long format with half-day sessions at UT to allow uninterrupted training in the morning, yet preserve work time for employees in the afternoons. Participants especially liked the diversity of faculty presenters, as well as variety of participants, which enhanced the learning experience by understanding each other’s roles and perspectives. Small class size, having powerpoint materials in advance, and snacks contributed to the learning experience.

Recommended changes to improve PHSA include: modify the pre/post competency assessment language to be more easily understandable and less intimidating to employees without formal training in public health; increase amount of daily group work to apply knowledge and skills to job; use more examples specific to Appalachian population; add a dinner or lunch to promote group unity; provide a list of recommended readings for those who want to learn more.

Future Directions: Based on resoundingly positive feedback from participants and faculty presenters, plans are being developed to offer PHSA in the summer of 2013, with a goal of continuing to increase relevancy and applicability. Opportunities to expand the PHSA to other regional areas will be explored.