

Hot Topics

Hosting the discussion since 2004

By Paul Wiesner, moderator

When I visited the Northwest Center for Public Health Practice (NWCPHP) in April 2004, I was seeking a way to ease into retirement after a long career in public health at the national, state, and local levels. “Maybe,” I thought, “I could find something to do to just to keep my hands wet.”

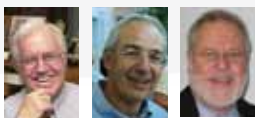
Jack Thompson and Andy Stergachis suggested that I might be interested in starting up a new monthly Web-conference called Hot Topics in Preparedness (HTIP), which was supported by a cooperative agreement award from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). We wanted to provide a forum where experts and practitioners in the field could share insights about best practices in response to urgent issues facing public health. The initial emphasis was on planning for, responding to, and recovering from public health crises.

HTIP is now one of the mainstays of NWCPHP’s connection to the practice community. But we didn’t know how well-received HTIP would be when we first launched it. Our first session took place on April 27, 2004. Jeffrey Duchin from Public Health — Seattle & King County presented on preparing for severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS).

Thinking about our first session five years and 67 sessions later, I realize that the ingredients for the success of HTIP were evident in that very first session: great speaker(s); enthusiastic participants; an interactive platform (iLinc); outstanding staff; an active network of state training coordinators; an engaged advisory committee; plenty of challenging topics; and the freedom to innovate and make improvements.

The NWCPHP staff deserves a few special comments. Each of the successive logistical coordinators (currently, Sarah Paliulis) has done a masterful job of coordinating with the regional trainers, doing all the behind-the-scenes work required for a live, monthly broadcast, orienting the speakers to iLinc and the nuances of effective distance learning, convening the advisory committee, trouble-shooting the system during the presentations and promoting objective evaluation with an eye toward improvement. Our coordinators have worked closely with staff instructional design professionals who ensure quality and organization of the presentations. Presenters (many of whom are experienced professionals on the speaking circuit) regularly comment about how much they learned about distance teaching or slide presentation from their experience with HTIP.

Search our Web site and you will see that the HTIP archive is a treasure trove of information about virtually every major issue facing public health over the past five and a half years. We have introduced stories from the field that vividly elucidate the talent of public health staff from all states in the region. We have broadened the lens on preparedness by introducing topics that have long-lasting effects on the infrastructure of practice—topics such as ethical decision-making, the art of dialogue, health care reform, and collaborative leadership. Each audience is eclectic, its composition driven both by the topic presented and by the popularity of the speaker.



Paul Bud Pat

Thank you Paul & welcome Bud and Pat!

NWCPHP thanks Paul Wiesner for his years of wonderful leadership. A revolving moderator schedule began in 2010, with Wiesner, Bud Nicola, and Patrick Libbey.



Tabletops at NWCPHP

After September 11, 2001, public health agencies became aware they were underprepared to respond to large-scale emergencies. Not surprisingly, this increased awareness led to increased interest in preparedness trainings.

NWCPHP has been able to productively respond to this interest by creating and facilitating tabletop exercises. Tabletop exercises go beyond testing individual knowledge; they teach planning.

Carl Osaki, a NWCPHP faculty member, has been identified as a national resource for developing, facilitating, and evaluating tabletop

exercises. When he was Director of Environmental Health at Public Health — Seattle & King County, Carl Osaki reported to the county’s emergency operations center, participating in a number of real life emergencies as well as training exercises. With NWCPHP, he conducts numerous tabletop trainings and exercises for local, state, and tribal public health agencies.

NWCPHP has received national recognition for its tabletop trainings. Bioterrorist Attack on Food: A Tabletop Exercise was ranked first among public health tabletops in a technical report published by the RAND Corporation in 2005.*

*Shugarman, L.R., Eiseman, E., Jain, A., Nicosia, N., Stern, S., and Wasserman, J. 2005. Enhancing public health preparedness: exercises, exemplary practices, and lessons learned. RAND Corporation technical report. http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/2005/RAND_TR249.pdf