

11-29-2016

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### Recommended Citation

Georgia Southern University, "Health Policy & Management News" (2016). *Health Policy & Management Department News (Through 6/28)*. 85.

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# Georgia Southern Examines Electronic Health Records and Meaningful Use in LHDs

November 29, 2016



Electronic health records (EHRs) are evolving the scope of operations, practices, and outcomes of population health in the United States. Local health departments (LHDs) need adequate health informatics capacities to handle the quantity and quality of population health data.

The purpose of this study was to gain an updated view using the most recent data to identify the primary storage of clinical data, status of data for meaningful use, and characteristics associated with the implementation of EHRs in LHDs.

Data were drawn from the 2015 Informatics Capacity and Needs Assessment Survey, which used a stratified random sampling design of LHD populations.

Oversampling of larger LHDs was conducted and sampling weights were applied. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and logistic regression in SPSS.

Forty-two percent of LHDs indicated the use of an EHR system compared with 58% that use a non-EHR system for the storage of primary health data. Seventy-one percent of LHDs had reviewed some or all of the current systems to determine whether they needed to be improved or replaced, whereas only 6% formally conducted a readiness assessment for health information exchange. Twenty-seven percent of the LHDs had conducted informatics training within the past 12 months. LHD characteristics statistically associated with having an EHR system were having state or centralized governance, not having created a strategic plan related to informatics within the past 2 years throughout LHDs, provided informatics training in the past 12 months, and various levels of control over decisions regarding hardware allocation or acquisition, software selection, software support, and information technology budget allocation.



In conclusion, a focus on EHR implementation in public health is pertinent to examining the impact of public health programming and interventions for the positive change in population health.

[“A focus on EHR implementation in public health is pertinent to examining the impact of public health programming and interventions for the positive change in population health,”](#) was published in the Journal of Public Health Management and Practice.

Dr. Karmen S. Williams, recent DrPH of Public Health Leadership alumni was the lead author and Dr. Gulzar Shah, Associate Dean for Research at Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health at Georgia Southern University was the co-author.

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# Georgia Southern Examines Information Systems

November 29, 2016



Informatics capacity building is resource and personnel intensive. Many local health departments (LHDs) face tradeoffs between using their resources to carry out existing mandates and using resources to build their capacity, for example, through informatics, to deliver essential services in a more effective and efficient manner.

The purpose of this case study is to describe how a mid-sized LHD built and used information systems to support its strategic objectives, clinical services, and surveillance.

The mid-sized LHD described here was chosen for its “best practices” in informatics capacity building and use by NACCHO’s study advisory committee. To conduct the case study, authors reviewed departmental documents and conducted semistructured interviews with key informants in the agency. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, thematically coded, and analyzed.

Findings from the case study suggest that including capacity building in informatics as a strategic priority is one of the most effective ways to ensure that informatics are assessed, updated, and included in resource decisions. Leadership at all levels is critical to the successful implementation of informatics as is proactive partnership with community partners who have overlapping goals. The efficiency and effectiveness of LHDs rely on informatics capacity, especially when resources are challenged.

The study titled “[Using Information Systems to Improve a Mid-Sized Local Health Department’s Effectiveness in a Time of Rapid Change](#),” was published in the *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*.

Dr. Gulzar Shah, Associate Dean for Research at Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health at Georgia Southern University was the co-author.

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# ***Georgia Southern Studies the Methods Behind 2015 Informatics Capacity and Needs Assessment Study***

November 29, 2016



The 2015 Informatics Needs and Capacity of Local Health Departments (LHDs) survey is the most recent comprehensive source of quantitative data on LHD informatics. Conducted by the National Association of County & City Health Officials (NACCHO), this is the third nationally representative quantitative study of LHD informatics since 2009. The previous 2 comprehensive quantitative assessments were conducted by NACCHO in 2009-2010 and 2011. Given that public health informatics is rapidly evolving, the 2015 Informatics survey is a much-needed country-wide assessment of the current informatics needs and capacities of LHDs.

The 2015 Informatics capacity and Needs Assessment Survey was conducted by Dr. Gulzar Shah, Associate Dean for Research at the Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health, on behalf of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO). This article outlines detailed methodology used in the 2015 Informatics survey, including

instrument development, pretesting, sampling design and sample size, survey administration, and sampling weights. A 9-member advisory committee representing federal, state, and local health agency representatives guided the design and implementation of this study.

The survey instrument was organized into 6 topic areas: demographics, physical infrastructure, skills and capacity available, public health workforce development needs, electronic health records, and health information exchange. The instrument was pretested with a sample of 20 LHDs and subsequently pilot-tested with 30 LHDs. The survey was administered via the Qualtrics survey software to the sample of 650 LHDs, selected using stratified random sampling. The survey was fielded for approximately 8 weeks and 324 usable responses were received, constituting a response rate of 50%. Statistical weights were developed to account for 3 factors: (a) disproportionate response rate by population size (using 7 population strata), (b) oversampling of LHDs with larger population sizes, and (c) sampling rather than a census approach.

The study titled "[The Methods Behind 2015 Informatics Capacity and Needs Assessment Study](#)," was published in the *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*.

Dr. Gulzar Shah, Associate Dean for Research at Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health at Georgia Southern University was the sole author.

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