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Georgia Southern Examines Urgent Challenges for Local Public Health Informatics

December 22, 2016



Good informatics improves public health. It enables public health agencies to be more responsive and productive. Improved accessibility to data can create more opportunities to improve health through partnerships, greater accountability, and improved efficiency. Informatics methods and approaches can address lack of timely data and enable quicker investigation of arising topics, from opioid abuse to factors related to school dropout.

The editorial discusses challenges to public health informatics while introducing the research articles in the special issue of the Journal of Public Health Management and Practice. The research articles in this supplement were based on a study led by Dr. Gulzar H. Shah, Associate Dean for Research at the Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health, Georgia Southern University, who also served as the lead guest editor for this supplement. The editorial also concluded based on the research in the supplement that the opportunity to improve informatics in LHDs serving populations of all sizes. But these research articles

also consistently demonstrate that large LHDs have significantly more capabilities in informatics and biosurveillance than do small LHDs. Of the approximately 2500 LHDs in the United States, about 140 serve populations of more than 500 000 whereas about 1500 serve populations of fewer than 50 000. Given that those large LHDs serve almost half of the country's population, it is vital to improve informatics in the large jurisdictions. This large LHD improvement is occurring through their own resources, federally sponsored fellowships, and grants. The LHDs with populations under 50 000 may serve less than 15% of our country's population, but improving their informatics is essential to building a resilient, responsive public health system.

This supplement clarifies the needs of these small LHDs. The prevalent practice of paper record-keeping discourages innovative use of information, decreases productivity, and hampers responsiveness. These LHDs face notable challenges around security, interoperability, and impacts of leadership changes. But as the Pomporaug District case study demonstrates, with stable leadership and consistent effort, small LHDs can improve their informatics. Other supplement studies indicate that shared governance models may also have factors associated with better informatics. This supplement contains indications of promising strategies.

[“Urgent Challenges for Local Public Health Informatics,”](#) the editorial was published in the Journal of Public Health Management and Practice.

Dr. P. Joseph Gibson, Director of Epidemiology at Marion County Health and Hospital Corporation, was the lead author of the editorial. Dr. Gulzar Shah, Associate Dean of Research at the Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health Georgia Southern University was one of the co-authors.

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