



State Report 2009

State: Alaska

Date: May 4, 2009

Contact: Rhonda Richtsmeier, MN, RN

Email: rhonda.richtsmeier@alaska.gov

Phone: (907) 465-8626

Fax: (907) 465-3913

Projects/Issues Addressed This Year:

- **Instituted BSN Requirement for New PHN Hires:**

After almost 9 months of negotiation with our Classification Unit we were able to successfully move from the BSN being the educational preference for hire into the Public Health Nurse job class series to it being the minimum educational requirement for all new PHN I – IV hires. This just went into effect in April of this year. In addition, the educational requirement for the PHN V (Regional Nurse Manager) job class was upgraded from a preference for a Master's degree to a requirement for a Master's degree. This successfully brings our minimum educational requirements in line with both our usual practice and with both the Public Health Nursing and the Nursing Administration Scope and Standards.

- **Had Major Changes in Section of Public Health Nursing Senior Leadership Team:**

Retirement of valued long-time PHN leaders made it necessary to recruit and hire a new Deputy Chief and 2 of our 5 Regional Nurse Manager (PHN V) positions in December 2008 & January 2009. Luckily we had some outstanding in-house candidates enabling us to promote-from-within into these positions. I anticipate that at least one, and possibly all 3, of the other of the Regional Nurse Managers will retire within the coming year. We are currently recruiting for 4 Public Health Center Nurse Manager (PHN IV) positions and 2 Nurse Consultant positions, all of which have become vacant due to retirement or promotion.

- **Established and Filled Full-Time Section of Nursing Recruitment and Retention Position**

This position was officially established at the beginning of the fiscal year, but other time demands precluded taking the time to recruit and fill it until February. It was both just in time and worth the wait! I am extremely pleased with the background, expertise, knowledge and energy of the person we found for this position. We saw a noticeable drop in hires during the time period between loss of the part-time long-term non-perm position we had devoted to this work and the hire of our new recruiter. I am looking forward to even better results with our new full-time recruiter.

- **Alaska PHN Practice Guidelines and Charting Manuals Completed:**

The development of Alaska Public Health Practice Guidelines, and a major update and rewrite of the PHN Charting Manual have both been multi-year processes involving a large number of staff from across the state. Both were great learning processes for all involved as we worked to come to consensus on standards and expectations, and on accepted variations in practice at the individual, community and systems levels. I am extremely pleased to report that both have been completed and published!! These will both be living documents with regular review and update processes in place. Both have been published to our internal SharePoint site and may be accessible on our website in the future.

- **Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement:**

Work is progressing very well on the implementation of a systematic quality assurance/quality improvement program for the Section of Nursing. Client and internal partner satisfaction surveys have been developed and put into routine use. Chart audit tools for use with client records have been completed for STD, Family Planning, Child Health, and Latent TB encounters, and work continues on audits for other program areas. All public health centers are conducting chart audits for at least one program area each quarter. This has resulted in a demonstrated improvement in the consistency of charting and client care services and follow-up. In addition, our QA/QI Nurse Consultant initiated and is facilitating monthly Department-wide meetings for those charged with QA/QI responsibilities.

Systematic training has occurred for all PHN staff via both webinar and sub-regional in-service presentations on use of the Logic Model in planning and carrying out outcomes-based interventions using current Section focus priorities of immunization, domestic/family violence screening, and STI prevention as examples. Statewide in-depth group and individual training on use of the new Charting Manual and addressing identified charting deficiencies was also carried out as part of our targeted QA/QI efforts.

- **Public Health Emergency Preparedness:**

PHNs continue to work actively on public health emergency preparedness and pandemic influenza planning and preparations. An online data collection tool has been integrated into our PHN Community Survey to facilitate documentation of vulnerable/special populations by number, need, and point-of-contact; and to identify community mass care sites by designated function, location, capacity, and resources. We are also just about to implement a PPE Inventory on SharePoint which will allow us to have immediate access to information of public health center supplies across the state. Our preparations and exercises have been extremely valuable as illustrated by the first-rate responses to flooding, the Mount Redoubt volcanic eruption, and most recently the H1N1 Flu pandemic.

We now have almost 450 Alaska licensed nurses registered as Alaska Nurse Alert System volunteers. Monthly newsletters are sent to ANAS volunteers informing them of preparedness training educational opportunities and other information of interest.

- **Continuation and Enhancement of PHN Academy:**

Alaska's PHN Academy for the orientation and training of new or "new to the state" PHNs has continued to thrive. The use of weekly iLink and teleconferences to present this interactive training has met our long-distance learning needs successfully. Evaluation of the graduates illustrates increased knowledge and understanding in concept areas including: community assessment, data analysis, public health core functions and essential public health services, ANA Scope and Standards of PHN Practice, PHN competencies, PHN history, public health law, and public health nursing as a relationship based practice.

- **Community Assessment:**

We have provided all State of Alaska PHNs training on the use of the Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnership (MAPP) tool over the past couple of years with the long term goal of increasingly engaging PHNs statewide in incorporating MAPP tools and processes into their ongoing community practice. We have seen increasing buy-in and interest over the course of time and PHNs are progressively beginning to conduct active outreach efforts to recruit local stakeholders as partners in community assessment and strategic planning associated to public health needs.

Projects/Issues Pending:

- **Incorporating PHN Competencies into Position Descriptions & Performance Evaluations, and updating PHN Job Class Specifications to better reflect current PHN roles and skills**

We have an internal group working to develop template position descriptions, and a performance evaluation tool specifically for our PHN staff that incorporates the PHN Competencies and the Scope and Standards of PHN Practice. I would very much like to see anything your agency may be using or working on in this same vein.

- **State Immunization Registry:**

Alaska is in the beginning stages of rolling out a statewide immunization registry. The software package purchased for this purpose has needed significant “tweaking” and ongoing negotiations with the Section of Epidemiology and the software vendors to make this workable for our Public Health Nurses. Work on this continues as we struggle to assure the registry will allow bi-directional data sharing with RPMS, our electronic client record system.

- **Website Update:**

A desperately needed website update is on the “Priority To Do List” for the coming year.

Issues and Special Concerns for Public Health Nursing:

- **Budget:**

The good news is that Public Health did not receive any budget cuts for FY 2010 and we are grateful for that reprieve. We are however, still working under “hiring freeze” and “travel cutback” directives received from Governor Palin in January 2009. It took only a week or two to receive a blanket freeze exemption for all PHN job class vacancies, but we have only just begun to receive position-by-position waivers for all of vacancies in other job classes. The falling price of oil, while a relief to all of us buying gas for our cars and heating our homes, is expected to have result in additional budget cuts as work on the FY 2011 budget begins.

- **PHN Recruitment and Retention:**

This is expected to continue as a concern for Alaska as well as the rest of the country.