

The South African Field Epidemiology & Laboratory Training Programme

BACKGROUND

Over the past 25 years, Field Epidemiology Training Programmes (FETPs) have been established in over 33 countries worldwide. There were four such programmes in Africa (Ghana, Kenya including South Sudan, Uganda, and Zimbabwe). South Africa launched its Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Programme (SAFELTP) in May 2006, the second programme to have a laboratory component, Kenya being the other FELTP. Two additional FELTPs started during 2008 (Nigeria and Tanzania).

The South African Department of Health, the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, National Health Laboratory Services, the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and the University of Pretoria, established this programme to build epidemiological capacity and strengthen public health laboratory practice in the South Africa.

The programme's main output is graduates with a Masters in Public Health (MPH) and two years supervised work experience and training aimed at strengthening practical skills and knowledge. The students participate in several core modules at the University of Pretoria and NICD and work under a supervisor for the remainder of the two years at a field placement site at national, provincial or district level within the Department of Health and the NHLS. On completion of all the requirements of the training programme, the field epidemiology fellows could take up positions as national and provincial epidemiologists, public health laboratorians, surveillance officers or other relevant positions in the South African public health system.

A limited number of short courses are also presented based upon needs identified by the Department of Health and NHLS.

ACTIVITIES, HIGHLIGHTS & ACHIEVEMENTS

- Assisted in 11 outbreak investigations
- Undertook 9 surveillance system evaluations
- Conducted 9 analysis of large databases

- Conducted 10 research projects
- The laboratory track residents attended the first laboratory module, "the Public Health Laboratory"
- Ms Charlene Jacobs, was nominated as a member of the Western Cape Provincial Disaster Management Team to deal with the setting up of refugee Camps for the victims of xenophobic violence in the Western Cape, May/June 2008
- Dr Khin San Tint and Dr Deliwe Nkosi participated in drafting the Epidemic Response Guidelines for Gauteng Province, May/June 2008
- Dr Deliwe Nkosi participated in the provincial roll-out of the NDoH, NICD and CDC-SA Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Training in KZN, 23 -25 June 2008
- Ms Dorothy Nteo and Ms Mirriam Malotle participated in the North West Province AFP surveillance review with the National EPI Directorate
- Ms Dorothy Nteo and Ms Mirriam Malotle participated in the Gauteng Outbreak Response Team during the novel Arena virus outbreak in Gauteng
- Dr Harris coordinated the post graduate Diploma in Tropical Medicine and Health and provided some lectures for the MPH programme at the School of Health Systems and Public Health of the University of Pretoria
- The programme has contributed to 19 articles in the Communicable Diseases Communiqué.
- Dr Khin San Tint examined MSc research report as an internal examiner; supervised MSc students and provided some lectures for the Steve Biko's Bioethics Division and School of Public Health at Wits University

SYMPOSIA AND MEETINGS

Dr Harris attended the AFENET Board of Directors meeting in Kampala from 15 to 18 June and the biannual Tephinet Programme Directors' Meeting during the Tephinet Conference, 1 to 6 November 2008, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

From 20 to 30 September, Dr Elizabeth Prentice joined an assessment team from CDC-SA - Dr Faustine Ndugulile (SAFELTP Laboratory Resident Advisor), CDC Atlanta and AFENET (of which SAFELTP is a board member), to conduct a laboratory capacity assessment in preparation for implementing a FELTP in Rwanda. The assessment achieved its outcomes and the RFELTP, which includes a veterinary epidemiology

component as well as a laboratory epidemiology component, is to be implemented in 2010. It is to be located within TRAC-Plus, the Epidemiology Division of the Rwandan MoH, which has close ties with the Rwandan National Reference Laboratory.

Dr Faustine Ndagulile attended the Tanzania FELTP Stakeholders meeting that took place between 18 and 22 June, 2008.

Ms Barbara Temane attended an administrator's meeting at AFENET in Kampala, Uganda.

- The SAFELTP staff and residents contributed to 5 articles in the Communicable Diseases Surveillance Bulletin of the NICD available from <http://www.nicd.ac.za/pubs/surbull/2008/>
- The SAFELTP residents delivered 2 oral and 16 posters at the NICD Academic Day, Johannesburg, South Africa, 11 November 2008
- A SAFELTP resident delivered a poster at the 4th Public Health Association of South Africa Conference, 2 - 4 June 2008, Cape Town, South Africa
- A SAFELTP resident delivered 2 oral presentations at the 11th Annual Prakash Vallabh Primary Health Care Research Conference, 2008, Johannesburg, South Africa

COLLABORATIONS

- The South African National and Provincial Departments of Health
- National Health Laboratory Services
- Other units in the National Institute for Communicable Diseases
- United States Centres for Disease Control and Prevention
- University of Pretoria
- African Field Epidemiology Network (AFENET)

CAPACITY BUILDING

- Enrolled nine 1st year residents in the 2-year MPH accredited programme; continued supporting and developing 10 residents in their 2nd year.



Discussing poster presentations at the 5th Global TEPHINET Conference, 1 to 6 November 2008, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Left to right: Mrs Anne-Marie Gouws (Field Supervisor, Mpumalanga), Dr Elizabeth Prentice (Laboratory Track Coordinator), Mr Eric Maimela (Field Supervisor, Limpopo), Ms Phumzile Zondo (2nd year resident) and Mr Eric Gogstad (Public Health Advisor, CDC)

- Dr Khin San Tint attended a GIS training session coordinated by the African Field Epidemiology Network (AFENET).
- 50 participants from provincial, district and sub-district Health Departments as well as from the NHLS and NICD attended the 2-week short course - Field Epidemiology: Principles and Practice Interactive Short Course in July and October 2008.
- 30 participants from the provincial Departments of Health attended the Epidemiology, Research Methodology and Monitoring and Evaluation short course in December 2008.
- A 2 week Scientific Writing module was conducted by Ms Elliot Churchill and 6 NICD staff members and 7 participants from African Field Epidemiology Network (AFENET) attended with the 1st year SAFELTP residents.



Residents of three cohorts of the South African Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Programme