

The RHINO Community of Practice: Building a Space for Data Users and Enthusiasts in Washington State

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Objective

To grow and facilitate a community of syndromic surveillance data users in Washington State, improving and expanding local syndromic practice.

Introduction

Prior to June 2016, there were 45 registered users of syndromic surveillance data in Washington State, with 29 (64.4%) representing 5 of Washington's 35 local health jurisdictions and 16 (35.6%) at the state level. Of those registered users, 9 (8.8%) had logged into ESSENCE at least once in the 6 months before October 2016.

In June 2016, the Washington State syndromic surveillance program began accepting Meaningful Use data and sought to increase its user base. To accomplish this, the Washington State Department of Health (WA DOH) designated a staff member to oversee outreach efforts to increase the visibility of syndromic data in the state, including the establishment of a Community of Practice.

Methods

The Washington State syndromic surveillance program—the Rapid Health Information NetwOrk (RHINO)—began the process of stakeholder engagement by delivering a needs assessment to 15 current and potential users of the Electronic Surveillance System for the Early Notification of Community-based Epidemics (ESSENCE) platform. The survey assessed interest in participation in a Community of Practice for Washington State syndromic data users, the timing and format for meetings, needs for technical assistance, and topic areas of interest. RHINO then used the survey results to create a bank of topics for Community of Practice calls and develop a strategy for long-term outreach and engagement.

In April of 2017, the RHINO team developed a new strategic plan and outlined metrics for evaluating growth and challenges in the program's outreach efforts, including plans for outreach to novel disciplines like emergency preparedness. These metrics included counts of invitations for speaking engagements, ESSENCE users, onsite ESSENCE trainings and attendees at those trainings, organizations and disciplines represented in the Community of Practice, Community members, and webinars facilitated for the Community. RHINO staff compiled monthly tabulations of these metrics to track progress over the course of the year and aid in adjustments to outreach efforts as necessary.

Results

RHINO received 10 responses to the survey, with 9 respondents from local health jurisdictions and 1 from WA DOH. Respondents indicated particularly strong interest in regular webinars, a database of resources, and live trainings to support syndromic practice in their work. They also expressed concerns about the distance which would be required for in-person meetings.

RHINO established that meetings would occur via webinar every other month and held 6 webinars between October 2016 and October 2017 on a broad range of topics including developing syndrome definitions, basic ESSENCE functions, using ESSENCE's Report Manager tool, monitoring influenza-like-illness in ESSENCE, and

using syndromic data for situational surveillance. In addition to the Community of Practice webinars, RHINO staff developed technical guides for both the Washington and National Surveillance Program's (NSSP) ESSENCE platforms, a handbook for using syndromic surveillance data in Washington State, and a curriculum for onsite ESSENCE training.

Between October 2016 and October 2017, RHINO offered 8 onsite ESSENCE trainings for groups of users at the Washington State Department of Health and local health jurisdictions, serving a total of 36 attendees. Over the course of the year, ESSENCE users in Washington State increased to 75, with 40 (53.3%) of them logging into the system at least once over the previous 6 months and 20 (26.7%) listed as "new users" who have not yet activated their accounts. The Community of Practice itself has 86 members representing 16 agencies and 19 disciplines.

As RHINO's profile increased and more potential users became aware of the availability of syndromic data, RHINO began receiving invitations to present for external partners. Between March 2016 and October 2017, RHINO received 8 invitations to present to audiences of potential syndromic data users. These audiences included leadership at the Washington State Department of Health and emergency preparedness and response organizations.

In the next year, the program will continue offering data trainings and partner meetings to better serve the needs of both current and potential data users in Washington State. As more jurisdictions begin to have production-quality data, RHINO will continue offering onsite training. RHINO has also built a relationship with the Northwest Tribal Epidemiology Center in Portland, Oregon to begin the process of exploring data sharing with the Tribal Nations and Organizations located within Washington.

Conclusions

Through the development and implementation of a detailed outreach plan, RHINO increased the user base and profile of syndromic surveillance data in Washington State. This work was made possible through the careful construction of strong relationships with new and potential partners and the decision to diversify RHINO's staff to include members with backgrounds beyond epidemiology.

Keywords

community of practice; ESSENCE training; data user outreach

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