



The Great Lakes EpiCenter News

Epidemiology Project of the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, Inc.

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Epidemiology is the study of the distribution and determinants of health-related states or events in specified populations and the application of this study to the control of health problems.

The EpiCenter provides epidemiological services to the Tribes in the Bemidji Area (Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota). The services include training and technical assistance in many areas of public health, data management, program planning, and program evaluation.

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Planning for the Future . . .

A note from the EpiCenter Director

Only 6 months ago I wrote my introductory newsletter article as the new EpiCenter Director. Some days I still feel pretty new and others, well...feel like I have been here for a very long time. I have learned a great deal and enjoyed meeting many fine people who are working hard for better Native American health. And, I can't say enough about the competent and caring staff. So, I think it's a good start.

One of my tasks to complete was the competitive continuation grant application for our primary source of funding from Indian Health Service, due June 30. While grant writing can often be a daunting ordeal, the process stimulates creative thinking about how to meet future demands, striving to balance the efforts between meeting the expectations of local Tribal health staff and the expectations of our funders. In fact, the tension between these two factors became the driving force for EpiCenter organizational change.

The funding amount awarded to implement our proposed new organizational roles will be known in early September. In the meantime during this transitional period, we are talking about the changes with people we work with on a daily basis, Tribal Health Directors attending association meetings and other opportunities to gather with partners. Once the funding level is known, we will seek input from Tribal communities about *how* to implement the objectives to best deliver epidemiological services.

Here is a snapshot of the proposed plan to address local Tribal health program needs while addressing the Indian Health Service Director's initiatives in chronic disease, health promotion/disease prevention and behavioral health:

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- Continue to place a priority on placing EpiCenter staff in the field at Tribal health program locations;
- Build on the community health profiles to include more data that is relevant to local health program decision making;
- Support the implementation of the 'Chronic Care Model' to emphasize an engaged patient/provider relationship in a community context;
- Identify an EpiCenter *Medical Advisor* to work at the direction of a Provider Advisory Committee;
- Integrate behavioral health data collection, analysis and reporting throughout health promotion and disease prevention activities;
- Seek data uniformity and consistency through active partnerships with Tribal health program staff, state and federal agencies;
- Expand and maintain a secure, centralized data repository of American Indian health information;
- Provide timely and comprehensive responses to Tribal technical assistance requests through defining specific epidemiologist roles and information system consultation and support.

A proposed staff of two "Front Line" epidemiologists will provide general epidemiology services such as Tribal specific profiles, contribute to the annual Three State Community Health Profiles, provide technical assistance to Tribal specific projects and serve as an epidemiology resource to committees and associations dealing with Tribal health programs. In addition, a 'Chronic Disease Epidemiologist' and an 'MCH Epidemiologist' will provide subject specific technical exper-

tise to Tribal initiatives in the three state area.

The overall goal of the new organizational structure is to manage complex epidemiological challenges through building trusted Tribal relationships and collaborating with State and Federal partners to reduce the health disparities that impact Indian communities. For more information and a role you can play, contact the EpiCenter at 715-588-3324.



Diabetes Coordinators Conference October 24-27

Check your mail for details and registration form.

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Olivia Byron-Cooper



When I decided to study epidemiology, I brought with me to graduate school at the University of Michigan, a firm grasp of the way health disparities can condemn entire groups of people to lives of lost potential. I grew up among disenfranchised Native Hawaiians whose despondency had led to chronic alcoholism; lived among people in poverty and watched women without pre or post-natal care bring disabled children into the world; and worked with new Latino immigrants whose fear of deportation keep them from seeking medical help for hypertension and diabetes, and infectious diseases including hepatitis and tuberculosis. Then, as a graduate student in epidemiology with a focus on international health, I worked in a cardboard shanty-town on the outskirts of Lima, Peru studying the social causes and behavioral changes leading to declining breast-feeding patterns; and in the remote Amazon city of Iquitos, tracking population migration and investigating individual behaviors related to the spread of Dengue Fever.

I had a gypsy-like upbringing, and have lived in and traveled to Hawaii, Appalachia, California, Mexico, France, Peru, Haiti, and French Guiana. It was an unorthodox way to grow up and it gave me a priceless perspective, an education in cultural understanding, and an appreciation of the effects of economic, social, and political disparity. It also ignited a fire in my belly.

I am thrilled at the opportunity to work for the Native Americans represented by the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council. I offer you my life experience, education, and especially my passion. I look forward to learning from you all, and collaborating to bring the best health care and highest quality of life to Native Americans in the tri-state area.

SUMMER INTERN

Liz Oftedahl is the summer intern for the Epi Center. She is working on a Master's Degree in Public Health and expects to graduate in December 2006. A field experience is a requirement for the degree. The Epi Center was looking for an intern with experience in maternal and child health to work on a draft MCH report and Liz was a good fit.

Liz is also an epidemiologist in the Maternal and Child Health program at the Madison Division of Public Health, part of the Department of Health and Family Services. She has worked for the MCH program for over 3 years and previously worked in the Bureau of Health Information and for the Diabetes Control Program. Liz was originally hired to work in public health because of her data collection and analysis and writing skills and had no previous health background. Unlike most students who study for a degree and then get work experience, she obtained her work experience and then decided to work on the degree.

Liz lives outside Madison. She is married and has 2 children, 2 stepchildren, and 2 cats. Liz will be with the Epi Center through August 3, 2006.



The EpiCenter is in the process of planning a Maternal and Child Health Conference. Please contact either Kristin Hill or Allison LaPointe with your ideas at (715) 588-3324. Or, email Kristin at khill@glitc.org or Allison at alapointe@glitc.org.



Great Lakes EpiCenter Mission: To support Tribal communities in their efforts to improve health by assisting with data needs through: Partnership Development, Community Based Research, Education, and Technical Assistance.

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