The Pasto project: Monitoring chronic diseases in Colombia

The Andean city of Pasto, among Colombia’s oldest towns and for centuries a religious and cultural center, is the site of an IANPHI project focusing on a new health problem for Latin America—chronic diseases. Latin American countries are experiencing an epidemic of chronic diseases that are having an overwhelmingly harmful impact on the health of their populations.

Colombia’s NPHI, Instituto Nacional de Salud, recognizes the huge burden of non-communicable conditions in the country and wants to fulfill its public health responsibilities through expansion into this area. However, without national capacity to generate timely and relevant data about determinants, risk factors, and interventions, the institute lacks a science base for public health action.

Recognizing this need, the institute applied for medium-term IANPHI funding to establish mechanisms to bridge the gap between information and national policy development. Building on a local initiative in southwestern Colombia, Instituto Nacional de Salud will use IANPHI grant funds to establish a pilot chronic disease study site in the Andean city of Pasto. Researchers will use multiple mechanisms to generate, collect, and disseminate chronic disease data—integrating disease surveillance, research, and monitoring functions.

Among the project’s goals are to:
- Identify trends in relevant indicators
- Assess health disparities associated with chronic diseases
- Identify priority areas and groups for interventions
- Assess the performance, cost-effectiveness, and impact of interventions, and
- Identify research gaps.

The project will increase technical capacity at the local level and also provide a chance to develop and evaluate a system that can be replicated country-wide. These activities will ultimately yield a sustainable network of surveillance and research sites to guide national-level public health decision-making. For more information on Colombia’s Instituto Nacional de Salud, visit their website at www.ins.gov.co.

Dr. Miguel Gonzalez, Principal Investigator for Pasto Project, Instituto Nacional de Salud, Bogotá, Colombia

Expanding the focus to include chronic diseases

Major causes of death in high-resource countries for decades, conditions such as cardiovascular disease, cancers, diabetes, mental health disorders, and chronic respiratory diseases are fast becoming threats in low-and middle-income countries as well—today accounting for over half of all deaths worldwide. Propelling the increase is population aging, the shift from rural to urban living, and resulting lifestyle changes such as decreased physical activity, poor diet, obesity, and tobacco and alcohol use. The increase in these risk factors and the associated rise in chronic diseases have profound health and social implications as well as heavy economic costs.

As countries add these problems to their public health agendas, some of IANPHI’s member NPHIs are grappling with their roles and expanding their responsibilities beyond a primary focus on infectious diseases. A key challenge is the capacity to collect data on chronic diseases and risk factors that governments need to set priorities and evaluate programs. Science-based planning increases the likelihood of successful disease control and enhances the ability to generate funding and sustain programs.

The project undertaken by Colombia’s IANPHI member institute, Instituto Nacional de Salud, can serve as a model for others who are embarking on this expansion of efforts.
IANPHI survey results
“Snapshot” of members highlights NPHI diversity and opportunities

Results of IANPHI’s 2007 survey of member institutes, focused on NPHI infrastructure and activities, are now available on our website. The survey was conducted to address the lack of data about NPHIs and to support the efforts of countries to create and enhance NPHIs.

Thirty IANPHI member NPHIs, representing all regions of the world and all economic levels, completed the survey. The results document the heterogeneity of IANPHI’s members and the many successful models for the organization of public health systems.

As noted by the authors of the survey report, “the diversity of NPHIs, even among economic rankings and WHO region strata, is consistent with the concept that NPHIs develop in particular ways that are determined by a multitude of factors, including the needs of the population, historical and cultural considerations, the political climate, and the other public health resources in the country.”

The survey findings will inform IANPHI’s future efforts and provide a baseline for measuring increases in NPHI capacity over time. Please see the full report, presented in the second issue of IANPHI Folio, on IANPHI’s website at www.ianphi.org.

IANPHI issues RFPs for 2008 grant awards

IANPHI is now accepting proposals for the next round of NPHI development projects. Please visit the IANPHI website (www.ianphi.org) to view descriptions of the projects and to download the following application materials:

- Request for Proposals for NPHI Short-Term Projects
- Request for Letters of Intent for NPHI Capacity-Building Projects
- Request for Letters of Intent for NPHI Creation Projects
- Request for Proposals for Research Seed Grants

Proposals and letters of intent are due on December 15, 2007.

Message from the President

I recently traveled to Bogotá, Colombia, to visit our colleagues at the Instituto Nacional de Salud and discuss the newly funded IANPHI project focusing on non-communicable diseases, described on page 1. Others from IANPHI’s Secretariat staff and member institutes have also been visiting current and potential project sites—in Malawi, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Mexico, Mongolia—to meet with colleagues and partners, assess capacity, and move ahead with project planning.

In our globalized world of e-mail, Skype, and web conferencing, electronic communication is easy and fast. But IANPHI still believes in the importance of personal connections—visiting and seeing our members at home to get a better sense of their resources, environment, staff, and programs. Based on my most recent trip, I can attest that the visits offer matchless opportunities for in-depth interchange, joint discussion of areas for emphasis and growth, and serendipitous alliances.

For most of our members, opportunities for personal connections occur mainly at our annual meetings, which are evolving as rich settings for developing plans and linkages in support of IANPHI’s goals.

For example, at the last such meeting in Beijing, Malawi’s Minister of Health attended as an observer and is now pursuing establishment of new a NPHI in her country.

But, as shown by the recent series of site visits and project launches, IANPHI is very active between meetings. We encourage our diverse membership to participate actively in our many efforts, some of which are described in this newsletter—to increase our connectivity and advance our service mission for the benefit of all.

Jeffrey P. Koplan, MD

IANPHI
Funded by The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, IANPHI is a peer-assistance organization dedicated to strengthening global public health capacity by strengthening and linking national public health institutes (NPHIs). IANPHI assists NPHIs, particularly those in low-resource countries, through grant programs targeted at critical NPHI needs. IANPHI is also a professional association for NPHI directors, providing a platform for advocacy and collective action in addressing public health challenges. www.ianphi.org.

About IANPHI

Stay connected

We want to be sure that all IANPHI members have the opportunity to exchange news, announcements, and success stories through IANPHI World. Please contact Ms. Allison Greenspan, Communications Coordinator, IANPHI Emory Sub-Secretariat, at agree2@sph.emory.edu to share your news or comments.
The Institute of Public Health of Serbia was formally established in 2006 but is the outcome of a long history. Located in Belgrade, the institute is named after Dr. Milan Jovanovic Batut, who in 1919 became the first Head of the Ministerial Commission for Epidemiology, the original agency that evolved to become the current NPHI. The current Director is Dr. Tanja Knezevic.

The Institute’s mission is to improve the health of the population of the Republic of Serbia through the “development of interdisciplinary and multisectoral activities in the Public Health System.” Considered the nation’s expert institution for public health advice, support, and research, the Institute employs nearly 250 staff and oversees a network of local Institutes of Public Health that span the Republic.

With a mandate to provide “health analysis and planning, health monitoring and reporting, planning of health services, analysis of health risks, and quality assurance,” the Institute’s activities cover a range of NPHI core functions, as reflected in its organizational structure. Centers and Departments address health promotion, informatics and biostatistics, prevention and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases, emergency preparedness, environmental health and hygiene, microbiology, public health research, and analysis, planning, and organization of health care.

Among the Institute’s many publications is the journal Glasnik, reporting on all areas of public health, and the annual Health Statistical Yearbook and National Health Survey of Serbia. With support from international partners, including WHO, UNICEF, World Bank, Global Fund, and the Canadian International Development Agency, the Institute conducts an array of projects to monitor and improve the health of the population. These range from epidemic detection systems, TB control, and water purification, to youth tobacco surveys and colorectal cancer screening.

Additional information on the Institute is available on their website at www.batut.org.yu.

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**NPHI PROFILE**

**Institute of Public Health of Serbia “Dr. Milan Jovanovic Batut”**

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**Member news**

Congratulations to Dr. Stephen Blount, IANPHI’s representative from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov), who has received a 2007 Presidential Rank Award. These prestigious awards from the U.S. government are given to a select group of senior executives for exceptional long-term results and consistent demonstration of integrity, industry, and a relentless commitment to excellence in public service.

Dr. Blount is the lead strategist for CDC’s global health activities, providing oversight for the Global AIDS Program, global immunization and disease eradication activities, international training programs, and global malaria, tuberculosis, and tobacco control efforts.

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**Meetings and events**

**October 10–13, 2007**
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Meeting of Latin American NPHIs
IANPHI member institute: FIOCRUZ (Brazil) www.fiocruz.br

**October 25–26, 2007**
London, England
Workshop on Public Health Aspects of Major International Sporting Events
IANPHI member institute: Health Protection Agency (United Kingdom) www.hpa.org.uk

**November 2–3, 2007**
Lisbon, Portugal
Meeting of Directors of European Union NPHIs
IANPHI member institute contact: INSA (Portugal) www.insa.pt
IANPHI resources available online at www.ianphi.org

Framework for the Creation and Development of National Public Health Institutes
Provides a common conceptual basis and language for discussing NPHIs and for helping countries that are creating or strengthening them.

2007 Survey of Members of IANPHI
Results of a survey of member NPHIs to inform IANPHI’s work and provide a baseline for measuring increases in NPHI capacity.

NPHI Toolkit
Complementing the Framework, provides ready access to a variety of web-based information resources that countries, NPHIs, and IANPHI peer-assistance teams can use as they work to assess, develop, and improve NPHIs and build public health capacity around the world.

IANPHI Brochure
Overview of IANPHI’s activities, approach, history, and governance.

Special journal issues feature IANPHI authors
The October 2007 issues of the British Medical Journal and Emerging Infectious Diseases feature commentaries by IANPHI members, partners, and Secretariat staff. Each of these journals, as well as other science journals throughout the world, simultaneously published articles on October 22 devoted to the topic of global poverty and human development. An additional article published in the November 2007 issue of the South African Medical Journal highlights the role of NPHIs in Africa and the contributions of IANPHI.

In the British Medical Journal, Dr. Jeffrey Koplan and colleagues make a compelling argument for providing donor funding directly to national governments to strengthen public health infrastructure. They note that the burgeoning aid community has created a chaotic situation in which low-resource countries are deluged with thousands of unconnected and uncoordinated vertical programs while “the national public health systems in these countries stagnate or dwindle.” As the focus of national public health responsibilities, IANPHI’s member NPHIs are a logical site for donor investment in public health infrastructure.

NPHIs will also have a critical role in achievement of new global health initiatives, which depend for their success on strong national public health infrastructure. In the October issue of Emerging Infectious Diseases, WHO’s Dr. Guénaël Rodier and others note the importance of strong NPHIs in implementation of the newly revised International Health Regulations. “By targeting the core of public health systems, especially in low-resource countries that currently lag behind in public health capacity and infrastructure, IANPHI will...strengthen [global health security] and yield global public health benefits of disease control and prevention....”

With a particular focus on Africa, the article in the South African Medical Journal describes the challenges and opportunities that NPHIs face in performing and coordinating core public health functions. The authors make a strong case for the role of IANPHI in yielding sustained improvements in national public health capacity and ultimately improved health outcomes for the global community.

See:
