

Human resource development in environmental health for Palau — a model program for Micronesia and the Pacific

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Abstract :

In Palau, prior to 1997, the highest degree qualification in Sanitation Division (now called Division of Environmental Health) under the Bureau of Public Health, Ministry of Health, was a Diploma in Environmental Health from the Fiji School of Medicine. By September 2003, during an Environmental Health Planning and Management Workshop (NEHAP), Human Resource Development (HRD) was declared as a priority area and therefore was incorporated into the Palau National Environmental Health Action Plan.

The Palau NEHAP HRD goal is to develop a human resource development plan for environmental health, which builds a career ladder with incentives. The initial public health courses in environmental health commenced in August 2004. A total of 25 participants registered for the sentinel course - PH 122: Introduction to Environmental Health. Students represented Palau's varied environmental health workforce, which included representatives from the National Division of Environmental Health and state sanitation programs. In December 2004 the Diploma of Public Health (DPH) Program in Palau was finalized. The environmental health workforce of Palau is very fortunate to be included in the Palau AHEC programs. This has come about due to the ongoing Ministry of Health support of environmental health program in Palau.

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Introduction

During 15-25 September 2003, the first ever Western Pacific Regional Workshop on Environmental Health Planning and Management, "Working Toward Healthy People in Healthy Islands", sponsored by the World Health Organization, took place in Koror, Palau. It was during this ten-day workshop that National Environmental Health Action Plans (NEHAPs) for the participating countries were developed and the inception of the Northern Pacific Environmental Health Association (NPEHA) took place.

One of NPEHA's missions is "promotion and support of continuing education and human resource development in environmental health", and during the ten-day workshop in September 2003, Sitaleki Finau, Professor and Head of the School of Public Health, Fiji School of Medicine FSM, gave a presentation on

distance learning programs for environmental health through the FSM. The seed was planted and the next steps were up to the Association and its individual country members. In the case of Palau, prior to 1997, the highest degree qualification in Sanitation Division (now called Division of Environmental Health) under the Bureau of Public Health, Ministry of Health, was a Diploma in Environmental Health from the Fiji School of Medicine. The rest of the qualifications were high school diplomas with on-the-job training. In 1997, the highest qualification was upgraded to a Master of Public Health. In 1998, the Division of Environmental Health (DEH) asserted its presence and came to life, in the eyes of the public, during the 1998 Micronesian Games in Palau. From then on, the programs and services of the Division began to expand. The increase in the Division's roles and responsibilities prompted an increase in human resources as well. Since 1998 the Division has grown from seven FTEs to currently eighteen FTEs and five Trainees.

Palau has been undergoing rapid changes in its ecosystem, socio-economic development and especially the health of its population due to Capitol Relocation Project, Compact Road Construction and a surge of Global Urbanization. It was identified in 2002 that Palau needed to adequately address these emerging issues. In order to address these new emerging environmental

health issues, the DEH workforce had to be qualified and capable. Clearly, capacity building and human resource development had climbed up the priority list.

By 2003, numerous on and off-island trainings had been offered to the workforce. Monthly continuing education (CE) presentations were offered at the Division level. However, a comprehensive human resource development plan had yet to be conducted or implemented. By September 2003, during an Environmental Health Planning and Management Workshop (NEHAP), Human Resource Development (HRD) was declared as a priority area and therefore was incorporated into the Palau National Environmental Health Action Plan.

The Palau NEHAP HRD goal is to develop a human resource development plan for environmental health, which builds a career ladder with incentives. One of its strategies was to identify the best plan for addressing EH training needs including funding sources. The best strategy turned out to be the Palau AHEC and the ball started rolling on 20 January 2004, four months after the encouragement planted by Dr. Finau.

The first two public health courses in environmental health commenced in August 2004. A total of 25 participants registered for the sentinel course - PH 122: Introduction to Environmental Health. Students represented Palau's varied environmental health workforce, which included representatives from the National Division of Environmental Health and state sanitation programs. The two more courses leading to a CPH (Certificate of Public Health) were offered on November 2004 with 17 participants. The CPH program was a success and DEH was informed that Palau AHEC would continue to provide funding for the Diploma of Public Health (DPH)

Program (see Table 1) through FY 2005. In December 2004 the Diploma of Public Health (DPH) Program in Palau was finalized in December 2004. The DPH training program again started in February 2005.

The environmental health workforce of Palau is very fortunate to be included in the

Palau AHEC programs. This could only have come about due to the ongoing Ministry of Health support of environmental health program in Palau. In closing, I quote former Vice President and Minister of Health Sandra Pierantozzi: "Environmental Health can no longer be in the back burner, it can no longer be just an issue of environmental health divisions in your countries,

"Environmental Health can no longer be in the back burner, it can no longer be just an issue of environmental health divisions in your countries, it can no longer be left begging for survival year to year and it can no longer be left as a hindsight activity".

Palau DEH Human Resource Development Timeline

Sep. 2003:	Dr. Finau's presentation during the Workshop
Jan. 2004:	Conference call (Dr. Dever-AHEC, Maireng-DEH, Dr. Finau-FSM)
Feb. 2004:	Follow-up meeting with FSM Faculty
June 2004:	Switch from Certificate in Environmental Health (CEH) to Public Health (CPH) Finalize courses for CPH Program specializing in EH
Aug. 2004:	First 2 courses begin: PH 122 and PH 123
Sep. 2004:	Courses: PH 124 and PH 126
Oct. 2004:	Courses: PH 128 and PH 111
Nov. 2004:	Last two courses end toward CPH specializing in EH: PET 227 and PH 326
Dec. 2004:	Finalize DPH Program with Dr. Finau
Feb. 2005:	Begin courses toward DPH: PH 124* and PH 221
Mar. 2005:	Courses: PH 126* and PH 222
May 2005:	Courses: PH 123* and PH 223
May 2005:	Courses: PH 128* and PH 225
Jun 2005:	Courses: PH 226 and PH 322
July 2005:	Last two courses toward DPH: PH 321 and PH 324
Aug 2005:	Graduation for CPH and DPH

* offered again for those who did not take it the first time it was offered

Table 1. DEH's HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN with Fiji School of Medicine (FSM)

Certificate in Public Health (CPH — Environmental Health

Requirements:

5 Undergraduate Courses (10 Undergraduate Credit Points)

At least 1-200 level and 1-300 level

Curriculum A (Food Safety & Consumer Protection)	Curriculum B (Community Health & Vector Control)
PH 122 Introduction to Environmental Health	PH 122 Introduction to Environmental Health
PH 123 Food Handling, Micro, and Hygiene	PH 126 Basic Medical Entomology
PH 124 Practicum 2: Food Safety	PH 128 Community Education
PH 227 Solid Waste Management	PH 227 Solid Waste Management
PH 322 Env. Health Project Management	PH 326 Environmental Health in Practice

FSM Course Delivered
PH 124 Practicum 2: Food Safety*
PH 221 Practicum 3: Aquatic Environment
PH 222 Water and Sewerage
PH 223 Human Physiology and Toxicology
PH 225 Practicum 4: Terrestrial and Human Ecology
PH 226 Pollution Assessment
PH 321 Practicum 5: Environmental and Health Impact Assessment (EHIA)
PH 322 Environmental Health Project Management
PH 324 Practicum 6: Environmental Health Project

Diploma in Public Health (DPH) — Environmental Health

Requirements:

10 Undergraduate Courses [+ 5 courses] (20 Undergrad Credit Points)

Certificate in PH is required

At least 3-200 level and 2-300 level

Bachelor of Public Health (BPH) — Environmental Health

Candidates are admitted to the BPH Program ONLY if they earned a Diploma with a "B" average grade or higher. Only Courses with a "B" grade, or higher, will be included in the computation of the 40 credit points required for a BPH Degree.

Requirements:

20 Undergraduate Courses [+ 10 courses] (40 Undergrad Credit Points) Diploma in PH is required Single Major: minimum of 9 Courses from the chosen Discipline (EH), of which at least 4 must be at the 300 level

it can no longer be left begging for survival year to year and it can no longer be left as a hindsight activity".

With this human resource development program, Palau hopes to articulate the need for the enhancement of skills and knowledge of the nation's environmental health workforce in order to address the increasing economic, environmental, social and cultural impact of ongoing development in this young nation.

References

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3. *Palau National Environmental Health Action Plan, 2004-2007*

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5. *School of Public Health and Primary Care Handbook 2004*, Fiji School of Medicine.