2020 NPCR WEST VIRGINIA CANCER REGISTRY SUCCESS STORY

STORY TOPIC: Covid-19 Collaboration

STORY CATEGORY: Public Health Impact

STORY TITLE: Surge Capacity Support and Collaboration with the Division of Infectious Disease During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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SUMMARY

States with smaller public health departments face an "all hands" situation in times of a public health emergency such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Registry personnel have developed a wide range of skills that are valuable to other offices and divisions, and our Registry has made significant contributions working with partners throughout the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health during the pandemic.

CHALLENGE

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed tremendous burdens on public health systems throughout the country, and this is particularly true for smaller state health departments with limited personnel and capacity. Fielding incoming requests for guidance, setting up data systems to capture COVID-specific information, and analyzing the volumes of information being collected to inform both the public and leadership all presented significant challenges.

SOLUTION

As the COVID-19 pandemic took hold nationwide in the spring of 2020, the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health enacted a surge capacity plan developed during the Ebola outbreak in 2014. The plan is a Bureau-wide "all hands" call, tapping resources across all divisions to support emergency operations.

WVCR's Program Director and Epidemiologists have participated in the pandemic response, making significant contributions to the effort in three main areas: case investigations, systems architecture/programming, and data analysis.

RESULTS

WVCR's Epidemiologists have conducted case investigations and contact tracing activities. All cases require follow-up, and we have supported these efforts to identify contacts of those who test positive for COVID-19 and to maintain contact with each case until symptoms have resolved. This process identifies active cases that can still transmit the virus.

WVCR's Program Director assisted in setting up the Text Illness Monitoring System (TIMS) onboarding all local health departments in the state to facilitate case contact activities and tracking international or out of state travelers. Our Program Director also provided programming and onboarding support for our state's move to a new infectious disease data platform called Chexout, which was implemented several months into the pandemic.

WVCR's Epidemiologists have provided data analysis support for the effort by setting up analyses and data displays to monitor the course of the disease, creating heat maps to track recent viral activity, and responding to ad-hoc requests for information from leadership and others. We also contribute to the pandemic response by processing the master case file each morning for daily updates to the state's website (www.coronavirus.wv.gov) and the press.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a challenge for many public health departments, particularly those with a small workforce. Skills of our employees were leveraged across the entire Bureau regardless of normal duties, but mindful of the fact we would return to our normal duties at some point. The systems and processes we have designed and implemented are self-sustaining, many of which can be updated with a simple "refresh" command. WVCR's contributions to the COVID-19 response will continue to provide critical data and capabilities post-pandemic.

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