

Collaborating and Adapting Training to Overcome Resource Challenges

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SUMMARY

The U.S. Affiliated Pacific Island (USAPI) Jurisdictions face numerous challenges while collecting data to complete abstracts. The cancer-related resources are widely disparate across the jurisdictions, so many of the newer biomarkers and registry data items are not relevant to the USAPI. Even with the advent of online resources, the time zone differences and poor bandwidth in some areas create barriers to attending trainings delivered by standard setters or central registries with robust educational programs and platforms. More than half of the registrars in the USAPI are not Certified Tumor Registrar (CTR)- certified. Therefore, creating or finding customized training materials has been challenging. With the addition of a newly certified Central Registrar in Guam, and collaborations with registry staff throughout the islands, the Pacific Regional Central Cancer Registry is now able to provide more frequently updated training materials that are tailored to the USAPI.

CHALLENGE

Imagine yourself working in a typical USAPI setting, which for most is categorized by the World Bank as a moderate- or low-moderate income country. Lush tropics, unreliable air conditioning, periodic rolling blackouts, frequent tropical downpours and seasonal super typhoons are the norm. Small, but mighty, the USAPI jurisdictions have close-knit communities, and the staff in health services generally know each other quite well. Data collection for case abstraction varies in degrees of difficulty. In some jurisdictions, case collection is like the continental United States of 20 years ago, before the advent of widespread electronic health records, reporting, or standards. In most jurisdictions, there is no electronic health record (EHR). Paper charts are not well organized. In a few, their medical records departments were damaged by a destructive Category 5 super typhoon or damaged by fire. In most places, advanced diagnostic tools are not available on-island and patients are referred off-island for care if there are sufficient funds in the health budget. Half of the jurisdictions have a full-time pathologist, and none have on-island cytopathology.

Health leaders in the USAPI recognize how important the registry cancer data is for both programs, services, and external funding. In the wider Pacific, most do not have similar well-structured processes with clean and generally reliable data that has been collected for more than 10 years. Additional challenges include the inability to attend online training and virtual conferences live as the USAPI includes five different time zones, where a 2 PM Eastern training means a 5 AM or earlier start. The standards being discussed are more advanced and complicated than most of our registrars need for their work, which entails reporting only the National Program of Cancer Registries (NPCR) required data items (if they are available). Many of our registrars find it challenging to filter out the relevant information and we have been looking for ways to tailor this information for the Pacific context and make it accessible given the internet limitations.

SOLUTION

We are grateful to our colleagues in Florida who have created the opportunity to tailor training in the Fundamental Learning Collaborative for the Cancer Surveillance Community (FLccSC). Our newly trained CTR can identify which standards or data elements are less relevant or are very problematic for the USAPI context. She works with other CTRs in Guam and utilizes frequent errors noted on quality improvement reports to determine priority topics. She can modify some of the cases and materials. With the assistance of the Program Manager, our registrars have become more facile with Zoom and in accessing files via cloud-based drives to download and review on their own desktops. For most areas where the registrars work, the internet connection is relatively stable, but to save bandwidth, most videos remain off. More regular sessions via Zoom have also been helpful to guide the development of priority areas for training.

RESULTS

We have developed a basic FLccSC site and developed two tailored modules focused on coding updates or addressing coding errors. Rapid-reaction Zoom meetings based on the common coding errors learned via the monthly case reviews have already decreased the incoming abstract error rates by at least 25%. Our feedback from the Pacific registrars who attend these Zoom calls and online trainings expressed that they feel more engaged this way and that they find it easier to ask questions and ask for guidance if they don't know or are just uncertain about something.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

As resources and infrastructure will remain substantially different in the USAPI compared to the rest of the U.S., stable funding and leveraging partnerships are required. Continued free or low-cost access to online platforms as Zoom, FLccSC, and webinars will help provide base resources upon which we can further tailor to the USAPI environment. We continue to utilize some NPCR funding to assist the non-certified registrars in their professional development, but we must account for many having a primary language other than English. While distance learning has been modestly successful, in-person training and technical assistance are critical for larger strategies around improving capacity, policies, or systems to improve cancer registration. Pacific-ized "boot camps" are also necessary for the newer registrars and for those being cross-trained to help with succession planning in each jurisdiction. We remain grateful to our partners at the CDC and many colleagues across the United States who continue to learn and desire to help improve the health of U.S. Pacific Islanders who have paid a great toll and made many sacrifices on behalf of U.S. interests in global security.

REGISTRY CONTACT INFORMATION

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