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Recognizing Excellence in Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Epidemiology: The 2012 Co-hosted 18th MCH Epidemiology Conference and 22nd CityMatCH Urban MCH Leadership Conference, the 25th Anniversary of the MCH Epidemiology Program, and the National MCH Epidemiology Awards

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Abstract

In December 2012, multiple leading agencies in the field of Maternal and Child Health (MCH) partnered to co-host a national MCH Epidemiology Conference. The Conference offered opportunities for peer exchange; presentation of new scientific methodologies, programs, and policies; dialogue on changes in the MCH field; and discussion of emerging MCH issues relevant to the work of MCH professionals. During the Conference, the MCH Epidemiology Program celebrated 25 years of success and partnership, and 16 MCH agencies presented six deserving health researchers and leaders with national awards in the areas of advancing knowledge, effective practice, outstanding leadership, excellence in teaching and mentoring, and young professional achievement. In September 2014, building on knowledge gained and changes in the field of MCH, leading agencies including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Health Resources and Services Administration, City- **MatCH**, and the Association of MCH Programs plan to

replicate the achievements of 2012 through the implementation of a fully integrated national conference: the CityMatCH Leadership and MCH Epidemiology Conference.

Keywords

National Maternal and Child Health Epidemiology Awards; Building capacity; Leadership; Workforce development

Introduction

Partnership is the foundation for successfully implementing Maternal and Child Health (MCH) programs and policies. To strengthen partnerships among MCH agencies, the Maternal and Child Health Epidemiology Program (MCHEP), Division of Reproductive Health (DRH), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB), Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA); and CityMatCH proposed to co-host annual conferences, celebrate 25 years of successful collaboration, and recognize the contributions of MCH professionals in the field. This article highlights the achievements of the co-hosted event, the 25th anniversary, and the National MCH Epidemiology Awards.

The 2012 Co-hosted 18th Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Epidemiology Conference and 22nd CityMatCH Urban MCH Leadership Conference

Advancing Partnerships: Data, Practice, and Policy

To promote long-standing partnerships, increase cost savings, and enlarge the peer-exchange forum, the MCHEP/ DRH/CDC, MCHB/HRSA, and CityMatCH agreed, in 2012, to fully integrate their conferences (referenced as ‘the Conference’) [1]. The aim of the integrated Conference, *advancing data, practice, and policy*, was supported by a dynamic keynote from Michael Lu, MD, MS, MPH, Associate Administrator, MCHB/HRSA, four plenary sessions, multiple workshops, symposia, pre-Conference trainings, and a dual scientific and program/policy track for concurrent oral presentations and posters [2]. More than 650 local, tribal, state, federal, and international MCH professionals attended the Conference in San Antonio, Texas, December 12–14, 2012. Other unique contributions the co-hosted event offered were the focus on scientific analysis and data translation at the local, state, and national levels; career mentoring and peer exchange for students and early career professionals; pre-Conference workshops on epidemiologic methodologies and leadership development; and skills-sharing sessions to advance best practices, novel approaches, and dissemination of knowledge on important MCH topics.

The three articles associated with the Conference, and included in this issue of the journal, highlight the keynote address, one noteworthy plenary session, and evaluation of the Conference. The keynote address, entitled, “A New Way Forward: Improving MCH in America,” underscores the need for the field of MCH to embrace the opportunities and challenges offered by the current political, economic, and social climate. The vision of Dr. Lu includes understanding how MCH can be further advanced by improving access, quality,

integration, accountability, and equity in science, programs, and policies. The plenary, “Using the Principles of Complex Systems Thinking and Implementation Science to Enhance MCH Program Planning and Delivery,” describes two innovative approaches that can be utilized by MCH professionals when planning, implementing and evaluating new MCH programs. Finally, the Conference evaluation describes the impact of Conference-related activities as applied by MCH professionals 6 months post-Conference. As a whole, including this summate, these four articles describe the impact of the co-hosted Conference and attendee experiences, and highlight innovative approaches for epidemiologic use and priority issues for the MCH field.

25th Anniversary of the MCHEP

In 2012, the MCHEP celebrated 25 years of capacity-building efforts in states, territories, localities, and among tribal partners. The mission of the MCHEP has been to promote and improve the health and well-being of women, children, and families by building capacity at state, local, and tribal levels to use and apply sound epidemiologic research to impact MCH programs and policies [3]. In 1986, in partnership with MCHB/HRSA, CDC developed the MCHEP to place senior-level MCH epidemiologists in states. Since its inception, the MCHEP has placed more than 35 senior-level epidemiologists in assignments to build capacity in more than 20 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, the US/Mexico Border Region, CityMatCH, the Indian Health Service, and the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board [4].

To achieve its mission, in partnership with other agencies, the MCHEP has focused on more than placement of senior-level staff. The program has also developed activities focused on advancing the use of MCH data and analytic capacity of agencies and organizations; evaluating, training, and educating in the field of MCH; developing MCH epidemiology leaders; and creating peer exchange opportunities for MCH professionals. Highlights of these activities include the following:

- Development of the MCH Epidemiology Conference
- Creation of MCH Epidemiology Grand Rounds to present information on an emerging MCH-related topic
- Implementation of the MCHEP Listserv as a forum for MCH epidemiologists
- Adaptation of the Perinatal Periods of Risk framework for use in the U.S. to better understand the causes of fetal and infant mortality
- Development of the MCH Epidemiology Training Course
- Initiation of a distance-based, long-term training initiative for local and state staff
- Support of the Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network (CoIIN) to reduce infant mortality in states

Additionally, the MCHEP has provided mentoring and technical advising to numerous fellows, students, and professionals, through support of programs including the Council for State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) fellowship program, Epidemic Intelligence

Service (EIS) Officer program, the Graduate Student Epidemiology Program (GSEP), and multiple university programs. Taken together, these activities exemplify 25 years of strong partnership between CDC and HRSA, with the support of other national partnering MCH organizations and state and local health departments, to improve MCH programs and policy through the advancement of MCH epidemiology.

The National MCH Epidemiology Awards

Since 2000, the Coalition for Excellence in MCH Epidemiology has provided national recognition for individuals, teams, institutions, and leaders who make significant contributions in MCH to improve the health of women, infants, children, and families by advancing public health knowledge, practice, research, teaching, mentoring, and the use of data. The Coalition consists of 16 MCH agencies, and is to be commended for recognizing and promoting excellence in the field of MCH epidemiology (Table 1). The purpose of the awards is to highlight contributions to MCH epidemiology in four major areas:

1. Advancing public health knowledge through MCH epidemiology and applied research.
2. Improving public health practice through the effective use of MCH data and epidemiology.
3. Strengthening MCH public health practice through excellence in teaching, mentoring, and training in the use of data, epidemiologic methods and applied research.
4. Providing leadership to enhance the political will to advance public health knowledge and practice and the effective use of MCH data, epidemiology, and applied research.

Awards are presented each year in six categories, including advancing knowledge, effective practice, outstanding leadership, excellence in teaching and mentoring, young professional achievement, and lifetime achievement. In 2012, the Coalition selected six deserving public health researchers, leaders, and mentors for their noteworthy contributions to MCH epidemiology.

Greg Alexander Award for Advancing Knowledge: Laura Schieve, PhD

Dr. Laura Schieve currently works for the CDC and has scientifically contributed to multiple MCH surveillance and research projects, including numerous studies on pre-pregnancy body mass index and pre-pregnancy weight gain. Six of her published studies were referenced in the 2009 Institute of Medicine Report on Pregnancy Weight Gain. Further, her study of low and very low birth weight Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) deliveries was identified as a Top 100 Science Story of 2002 by Discover Magazine. The leadership of Dr. Schieve in the field of ART has continued to provide foundational research results including maximum success rates among ART subgroups with decreased embryo transfer, and identified a higher risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes among ART singletons compared with naturally conceived singletons. This body of work, plus more recent contributions to

the field of MCH in the areas of developmental disabilities and autism identify her as more than deserving of the Greg Alexander Award for Advancing Knowledge.

Greg Alexander Award for Advancing Knowledge: Matthew Gillman, MD

Dr. Matthew Gillman is Professor and Director of the Obesity Prevention Program in the Department of Population Medicine at the Harvard Medical School and Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Institute, and Professor at the Harvard School of Public Health. One of his major contributions to the field of MCH is Project Viva, a longitudinal pre-birth cohort study using a life course epidemiology framework to follow women, children, and their offspring forward in time. The project has been used to research a multitude of MCH issues among this multigenerational cohort, including mercury exposure, gestational weight gain, Vitamin D deficiency, and asthma. In 2012, Dr. Gillman co-edited and published a hallmark book on adverse effects of maternal obesity. In addition to his contributions to science, Dr. Gillman has advanced the field of MCH research through his influential work as an educator. His work in the field of MCH exemplifies the definition of the Greg Alexander Award for Advancing Knowledge.

Outstanding Leadership Award: Christina D. Bethell, PhD, MPH, MBA

Dr. Christina Bethell is a Professor of Pediatrics at Oregon Health and Sciences University and founding Director of the Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. A strong advocate for MCH populations, Dr. Bethell has devoted her career to improving the quality of MCH measurement and increasing access to MCH data. Her leadership has led to the development of the screener for children with special health care needs (CSHCN), as well as National Quality Forum (NQF) endorsement of over 45 measures related to children's health care quality, and the development of direct-to-parent engagement tools. As Director of the Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health, she has dramatically increased access to MCH data through the provision of online data, resulting in more than 38 million web visits. The commitment of Dr. Bethell to release data in a timely manner and her innovative efforts in measurement design support her receipt of the Outstanding Leadership Award.

Excellence in Teaching and Mentoring Award: Michelle Williams, ScD, SM, MS, AB

Dr. Michelle Williams is the Stephen B. Kay Family Professor of Public Health and Chair of Epidemiology at the Harvard School of Public Health. With more than 20 years faculty experience, her development of courses and teaching in the field of MCH is surpassed only by her mentoring of early career professionals. In 1993, Dr. Williams developed the Multidisciplinary International Research Training (MIRT) Program as faculty at the University of Washington. The program targets students from low-income and minority backgrounds for careers in public health through public health practice among MCH populations in the developing world. In 2011, Dr. Williams received the Presidential Award for Mentoring for the MIRT Program. To date, her teaching and mentoring achievements of early career professionals have enabled a new generation of MCH epidemiologists to enter the workforce better prepared and well-trained.

Effective Practice at the State Level: Donald K. Hayes, MD, MPH

Dr. Donald Hayes is a senior MCH epidemiologist assigned from the CDC to the State of Hawaii and, since 2007, has provided expertise in development of scientific tools and reports critical to state programs. His scientific contributions have influenced essential services in the state of Hawaii by building the evidence base for MCH programs. Dr. Hayes has improved the analytic capacity for the State of Hawaii through focused efforts to analyze data from state surveillance systems. He has published more than 23 peer-reviewed manuscripts, over 25 state-specific reports, 25 fact sheets, and has provided nearly 100 presentations to various stakeholder audiences. He is also an Associate Editor for the *Hawaii Journal of Medicine and Public Health*. Based on these accomplishments and contributions to the Hawaii Department of Health, Dr. Hayes is more than deserving of the Effective Practice at the State Level Award.

Young Professional Achievement Award: Lisa M. Bodnar, PhD, MPH, RD

Dr. Lisa Bodnar is an Associate Professor of Epidemiology, Psychiatry, and Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Pittsburgh. She has significantly contributed to MCH epidemiology through her work on post-partum anemia, gestational weight gain, and Vitamin D levels and pregnancy outcomes. She is currently the Principal Investigator on three National Institutes of Health grants, has published 62 peer-reviewed manuscripts, and has chaired scientific symposia for the American Society for Nutrition and the Society for Epidemiologic Research (SER). She has received the Public Health Service Award from the University of North Carolina, School of Public Health; the Abraham Lilienfield Student Prize Award from SER; and the New Investigator Award from the National Institutes of Mental Health and the American Society for Bone and Mineral Research. Her achievements exemplify the Young Professional Achievement Award.

Awards for the Upcoming Year

The Coalition for Excellence in MCH Epidemiology has convened and selected the recipients for the 2014 awards. To continue increased recognition of outstanding contributions by MCH professionals, the Coalition strongly urges readers to consider nomination of colleagues and peers to highlight their important accomplishments during the next award cycle for 2016. For more information, go to <http://www.citymatch.org/conference/citymatch-conference/2014/mch-eipdemology-awards>. The 2014 awardees will be announced at the National MCH Epidemiology Awards Luncheon during the Conference in Phoenix, Arizona, on September 18, 2014.

Conclusion

In 2012 during the Conference, the many successes of MCH professionals and the MCHEP were acknowledged and celebrated. In 2014, Conference organizers representing all partnering agencies plan a dynamic, fully integrated Conference with two special keynote addresses, three plenaries on innovative issues relevant to the MCH field, nine pre-Conference training opportunities, and multiple workshops, symposia, concurrent oral, and poster presentations on emerging issues in MCH. Long-term impact of information presented at the Conference on the practices of MCH professionals will also be evaluated.

Please plan to engage in this exciting peer exchange opportunity to both share current programmatic and policy issues, and new epidemiologic methodologies with colleagues.

Acknowledgments

The findings and conclusions in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Health Resources and Services Administration, or the Department of Health and Human Services.

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Table 1**Coalition for Excellence in Maternal and Child Health Epidemiology Member Organizations (Acronym)**

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)
American Public Health Association (APHA)
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs (AMCHP)
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH)
Association of Teachers of Maternal and Child Health (ATMCH)
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Division of Reproductive Health (DRH)
CityMatCH
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE)
Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB)
Maternal and Child Health Journal (MCHJ)
National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO)
National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems (NAPHSIS)
National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN)
National Institutes of Health (NIH), Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health & Human Development (NICHD)
National March of Dimes Foundation (MoD)
Society for Pediatric and Perinatal Epidemiologic Research (SPER)

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