



Leadership Training in Maternal and Child Health

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Accountability, evidence-based activities, and elimination of health disparities have become hallmarks of health services in public health and clinical medicine. To address these issues, a program of courses in Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Leadership has been developed at the University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) Department of Public Health Sciences and Epidemiology (DPHS&E). This program aims to strengthen MCH professionals' competencies in data analysis and data-based program management; and address health problems of geographically isolated and culturally diverse populations. A significant contribution towards fulfilling a major goal of Healthy People 2010, which is the "elimination of health disparities", is the expansion of the availability of well prepared health workers who reside in geographically isolated areas, belonging to minority or underrepresented populations.

Women and children have a wide range of health needs^{1,2} and often suffer disproportionately from health disparity prevalent among minority populations. The Census Bureau estimates that minority groups represent 77% of the population in Hawaii and that Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders in the state comprise the largest number among all the U.S. states (271,000)³. The University of Hawaii contributes to addressing minority health issues by training health professionals for the identified region.

The PH Certificate in MCH Leadership Program (see Note) intends to expand the MCH leadership in the region by recruiting and training MCH professionals in Hawaii and the U.S.-Associated Pacific Islands jurisdictions. The program focuses on health workers who reside and/or serve in isolated geographic areas, belong to minority or underrepresented populations, and work full-time. The curriculum concentrates on essential public health functions. The courses prepare students to be competent in five focus areas:

1. Analytical skills, including the ability to understand data and their relevance to program planning and policy development; and to communicate data as information.
2. Skills in needs assessment and priorities identification; program planning and proposal writing; program evaluation.
3. Skills in administration, management and policy development based on identified gaps; history of MCH programs and legislation; and advocacy skills.

4. Skills in community development, including the understanding of how communities function, the ability to identify, strengthen and support community leaders, and work successfully in a multicultural/multiethnic environment.

5. Skills to apply leadership concepts and principles in practice settings such as using a variety of communication techniques to advocate for MCH issues to the legislators, the press, and the community.

Competencies in focus areas are achieved by overlapping acquisition of progressively higher levels of knowledge and skills throughout the program. Learning objectives are presented in seemingly compartmentalized manner for the sake of clarity and course syllabus requirements. However, the objectives overlap and reinforce each other. The requirement is that courses be taken sequentially after having satisfactorily completed each objective before proceeding to the next.

The curriculum is implemented by the problem-based approach. Examples and illustrations are taken from existing MCH programs/projects in the State and the Pacific Islands jurisdictions. Material for exercises and hands-on practice include projects, interventions or issues identified from the student's agency or the community. Data are obtained from MCH service agencies, state vital statistics, the census, surveys and other local research.

The program is geared toward working professionals and offers worker-friendly scheduling (evening and weekends classroom hours). Condensed, intensive classes are held in summer months. Currently, the PH Certificate in MCH Leadership is only available on the UH Manoa campus. Travel and tuition scholarships are available to students from U.S.-Associated Pacific Islands and neighbor Hawaiian Islands. In spite of these efforts, community meetings and discussions with health care professionals in the field have revealed that there is a need and desire for classes to be made available on site, on the neighbor islands, as well as in the Pacific Basin. Prospective students have expressed strong interest for continuing education and enhancement of MCH skills and competencies, but are unable to travel to the Manoa campus. To accommodate these students, a distance-learning element of the program is being developed. Options include ITV, HITS, Internet access and WebCT, and periodic live classes conducted by the faculty at the distance sites.

The PH Certificate in MCH Leadership training has enhanced the participants' abilities to adapt to change, to incorporate "lessons learned" from the experiences of their classmates, to generate new knowledge and innovative ways of understanding health and healthy behaviors. Participants have acquired skills in data analysis, presentation and interpretation, program planning and program evaluation. The curriculum's interactive approach has improved communication skills and confidence, provided students the ability to identify and articulate lacunae in health care and health care policies, and promoted self-assurance to initiate effective advocacy and change. Above all, students have gained the appreciation of incorporating the communities' cultural strengths in their work.

The graduate certificate in MCH leadership is also open to UH graduate students and other community professionals interested in MCH or wishing to upgrade their leadership skills. It offers the possibility for interested students, who meet admission requirements, to continue towards the MPH degree with specialization in Social and Behavioral Health Sciences. It also provides MPH students in epidemiology and social and behavioral health sciences the op-

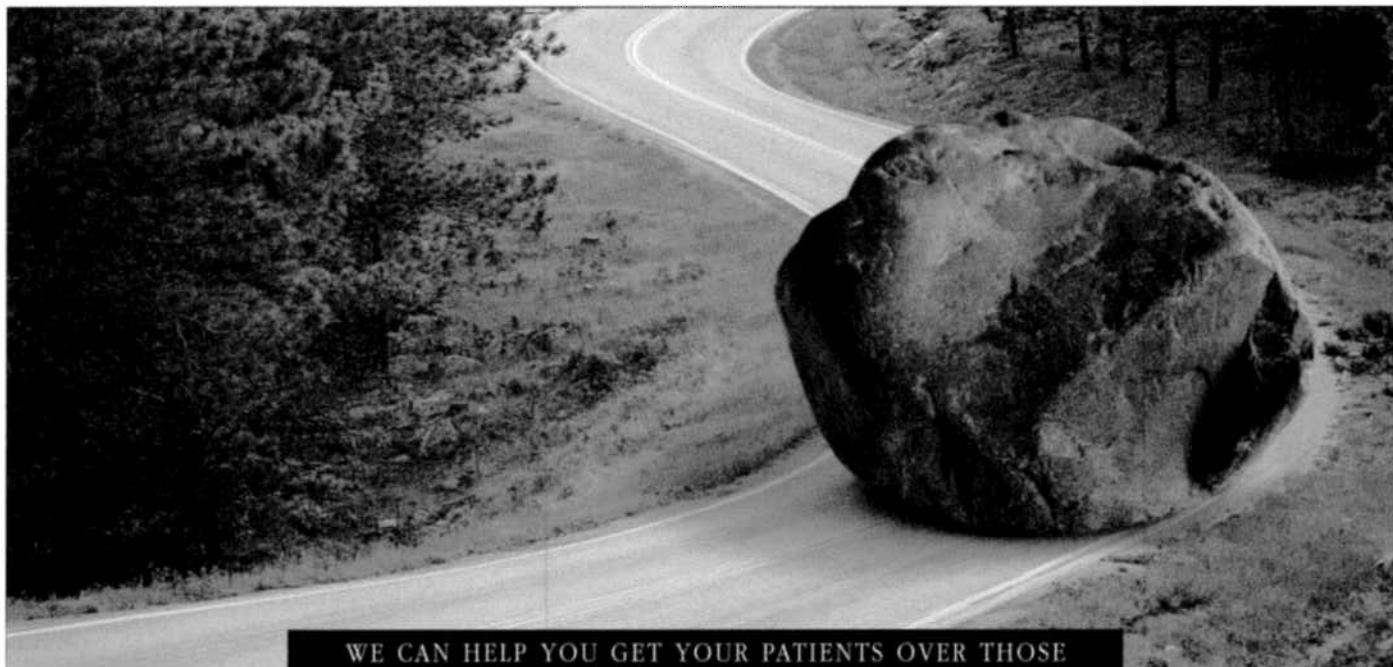
portunity of a sub-specialization in maternal and child health, an important public health field.

Since January, 2002 the MCH certificate program has trained 25 health professionals. Thirteen of them have completed the Certificate and 12 are at different stages of the program. The development of leadership skills remains as the main theme for all who occupy positions of influence in a health system and are called upon to promote community participation in health endeavors.

References

1. Hawaii Women's Health Status. Chart Book for Planning and Development. First edition 2004.
2. Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT: State Profiles of Child Well-Being, available at: www.aecf.org/publications/data/kc_2004e.pdf. 2004.
3. Census Bureau News Release: State Population Estimates: July 1, 2002.

NOTE: The Public Health Certificate in MCH Leadership is supported by the Federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB), Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). It is located in Department of Public Health Sciences and Epidemiology (DPHS&E), John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM), at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.



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