

Institute Name: Kentucky Public Health Leadership Institute

Project/Case Title: Kentucky Public Health Nurse Competencies

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Today's public health workforce faces many new challenges that did not exist a half century ago. The American population has undergone changes in lifestyles, chronic diseases, and communicable diseases. New challenges include bioterrorism and emergency preparedness. A competent workforce is essential to rendering public health services in this ever-changing environment. The Kentucky Department for Public Health (KDPH) is working to assure competence among public health professionals throughout the state's local health department system. KDPH's Training Branch initiated Transition Training in Fall 2000 that included:

- Public Health 101
- Core Functions and Essential Services of Public Health
- Developing, Implementing, and Evaluating Health Department's Disaster Emergency Management Plans
- Documentation Can Be Your Best Friend or Your Worst Enemy

Along with these educational offerings, nurses formed a task force to discuss job description changes. The progress of this task force was significant, but was diverted by more urgent efforts to provide training in disaster preparedness and bioterrorism.

In April 2002, seven participants in the Kentucky Public Health Leadership Institute (KPHLI) expressed an interest in defining nursing competencies for local health department nurses. This Change Master Project group was comprised exclusively of public health nurses. Dialogues were initiated among the Change Master group, the Department for Public Health Local Personnel Branch and Training Branch, and the Department for Public Health Chief Nurse to review and discuss the accomplishments and current status of the task force. Proposed new job descriptions were examined. A review of nursing and public health literature was conducted.

Several group members attended the 2002 Kentucky Department for Public Health Fall Conference presentation by Kristine Gebbie, Dr.P.H., RN. Gebbie, a nationally recognized public health nurse leader who has made significant contributions in the area of public health nurse competencies as it relates to the Ten Essential Public Health Services, addressed public health workforce competency in a post-September 11 world.

The final product of this group's work is the development of the "Registered Nurse Initial Employment Competency Validation Checklist" (Checklist). This Checklist is designed as a tool to assure uniform competencies among newly hired public health nurses. The Checklist includes Core Functions of Public Health activities and links each function to one or more of the Ten Essential Services of Public Health.

A presentation regarding nursing competencies was delivered in February 2003 to the local health departments' Directors' of Nursing and Supervisors. The Checklist was favorably received, but evaluations revealed a need for implementation training. In April 2003, the Checklist and the final report were presented at the KPHLI graduation summit. Future plans include several presentations to local health departments and nursing faculty throughout the state. A Public Health Nursing brochure and poster presentation has been developed to further promote this project.