



MEETING REPORT

**Training course on managerial
skills for outbreak investigation
coordinators**

21 – 26 January 2007

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I. Introduction

The mandate of ECDC is to strengthen the capacity of the European Union (EU) for the prevention and control of infectious diseases. One of the approaches to address this mission is through continued training of qualified human resources. The guiding principles of ECDC's training strategy are the following:

- Building on achievements: expertise and lessons learnt in applying field epidemiology in the EU will be used for developing training materials aiming at translating knowledge into skills and good practices.
- Sharing a common field epidemiology culture: emphasis will be put on ensuring the highest level of interactions between the Member States (MS) institutes and ECDC, resulting in a broad network of field epidemiologists.
- Getting field epidemiology recognition: ECDC will seek recognition of participation to ECDC sponsored training by an EU accreditation in intervention epidemiology. This professional accreditation will require specific negotiation with MS and EU institutions.

In accordance with this training strategy, ECDC organized a one-week training module (given in 2 different sessions) on managerial skills for outbreak response coordinators. Below we report on the second session, which took place in Sigtuna, from 21 to 26 January 2007, and provide general recommendations based on the experience of both sessions together. A separate report on the first session was finalized previously.

II. Course objectives

The overall course objectives were defined as follows:

- To strengthen management and leadership capacity during outbreak response at national and regional levels, for both single and multi-state outbreaks occurring in the EU.
- To achieve team building and networking between colleagues with similar outbreak control responsibilities in various EU member states and at ECDC.

In order to reach these objectives, three main pillars for training were identified: decision making, communication and team management.

Participants' feedback

Most of the participants found that their personal as well as the published course objectives were completely or well met. One person stated that the objectives were not very well met, referring to too a limited focus on the specific characteristics of a public health crisis situation. This person found the course objectives misleading.

Participants particularly liked the interaction with colleagues from other EU countries. One person recommended addressing the European level also in the exercises.

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The information given to the participants before the start of the course could be improved, with a more detailed course schedule. A few participants were informed rather late that they would participate in the course.

III. Training site

The venue of the training was Kristina, a hotel & conference centre in Sigtuna, a village about 50 km outside of Stockholm.

Participants' feedback

The facilities were well appreciated by all participants, as well as the food and refreshments served. The training room had all necessary equipment, and the centre's service was very friendly and efficient.

IV. Participants

There were a total of 17 participants, with 2 persons from Iceland and Lebanon. The European member states represented included Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic and Sweden. Among these participants, there were two members of the ECDC Advisory Forum.

One person had graduated from medical school only a few months previously. The concerned member state was contacted before the start of the course in order to signal the discrepancy with the target group of the training but no changes were possible. The other participants were all very experienced, although not necessarily in a current management position.

Participants' feedback

Several participants commented on the importance of having a group with comparable experience.

V. Trainers

Apart from the media training session, Carmel Buttimer, the consultant of Schouten & Nelissen was the only trainer during the week. She was assisted by two ECDC epidemiologists for the practical organization of the course. The media training session was ensured by consultants from Media Consulta and World Television (based on an existing framework contract).

Participants' feedback

All participants agreed that the trainer was very knowledgeable of the topics covered, had excellent communication skills and had a very good relationship with the group.

Also the media training trainers were appreciated.

VI. Planning

A revision session with the consultant was organized after the first training session in October, during which the evaluations and feedback were reviewed, and the implementation of the recommendations was discussed.

Compared to the first session, only slight changes were made to the final planning, which was again based on three main pillars: decision making, communication and team management. (Annex 1: Course planning) Participants were asked to arrive on Sunday, early evening, for the introduction of the participants and a brief session on the expectations of the course. The course finished in the early afternoon of Friday, after the course evaluation.

While no specific evening sessions had been organized, participants had the opportunity to see a popular movie related to outbreak response management (“Outbreak”).

Finally, in order to give the opportunity to enjoy some fresh air and daylight, a short tour of the village of Sigtuna was organized during an extended lunch break.

VII. Teaching and evaluation methods

Most of the plenary sessions were facilitated using the “metaplan”¹, which implies a very active and interactive teaching style, actively engaging the participants. PowerPoint was only used during the media training session ... For the practical exercises, which were done in three or four small groups, one main outbreak scenario had been developed (chikungunya outbreak in Europe), in which the practical work was fitted. At the end of each day, participants were asked to list their personal action points, based on the lessons learnt for the day. Finally, participants were asked to write down their own personal case, based on a current and existing management dilemma in their work environment.

Participants were asked to fill in a daily evaluation in addition to the final overall course evaluation on Friday afternoon. (Annex 2: Daily evaluation form, Annex 3: Final evaluation form) Both types of evaluation provided useful and complementary feedback, which was integrated in this report.

Participant’s feedback

Most participants thought there was a good to very good mix between theory and practice, and a good balance between group work and individual work. Participants liked in particular the use and discussion of their own personal cases. The teaching methods were well appreciated, as well as the handouts and the course documentation material. A few participants would have liked to have received the reading material related to the exercises beforehand, in order to facilitate following the sessions.

¹ More information on Metaplan can be found on: http://www.12manage.com/methods_schnelle_metaplan.html

VIII. Evaluation of training sections

Participants' feedback

In general, participants found that the content covered during the training course was relevant to very relevant, with the right amount of content covered, and taught at a right level and over a right period of time. One person thought the content covered was too much in a short period of time. Two persons thought the module was too long, referring to the difficulties of being away from the regular work for one full week (which might be an obstacle for more senior people to participate), and suggesting breaking it up in different modules.

1. Arrival, expectations and introduction

Participants' feedback

Ten out of the 17 participants arrived in time to join in the brief introduction session on Sunday evening, where participants presented each other and expectations towards the training were discussed. Also the dinner before the actual start of the module contributed to breaking the ice.

2. Introduction to management

On Monday morning, the course started with the session introducing leadership and managing people and presenting the model of management (section 1 in the planning). In the afternoon, a few cases of “simple” management issues were discussed in small groups, which were already put in the context of a possible outbreak.

At the end of the day, participants were given some homework, and asked to write up their own management dilemma case, based on a recent experience in an outbreak situation.

Participants' feedback

This first introductory day was well appreciated, in particular the approach of thinking in systems. Participants liked the practical case work a lot, including the reflections on the functioning of a team.

The personal cases were discussed in small groups and plenary sessions spread over the whole week. Participants expressed several times that they found this really useful, and that they appreciated the time taken for this.

3. Decision making

The general objective of this topic was to acquire methods and skills for rapid and evidence-based decision making, including situational analysis and priority setting. The specific objectives were 1) to be comfortable in the communication of a decision, 2) to ensure the implementation and follow-up of a decision, and 3) to critically appraise and cope with the consequences of wrong decisions.

In the planning, this topic is covered mainly under section 4 (“setting objectives and managing priorities”), even though it came back in the communication sessions as well.

Participants’ feedback

The session on decision making was well evaluated, although more focus on the subject was suggested. The main comments referred to the need for more time to digest and reflect on the questions asked.

4. Communication

The general objective of this topic was to select, prioritize and structure information relevant to the decision process. The specific objectives were 1) to select the best adapted means of communication according to the purpose of the communication, 2) to chair meetings, according to the different forms these can take (face to face and video/teleconference), and 3) to acquire skills for addressing the media.

There were five specific communication sessions foreseen in the planning: on writing a briefing document or situation report, on simple communication techniques, on how to manage conflict and negotiation, on information management (including chairing of meetings and teleconferences), and finally the media training session.

Participants’ feedback

The first communication session (section 3 in the planning) was on the writing of a briefing/situation report (“sitrep”), which was well evaluated. One person did not like it and thought it was too basic. One suggestion was to include here more on what ECDC wants from the Member States.

The second communication session (section 5 in the planning) was very positively evaluated by the participants, who found the role plays very good and useful. More focus on communication in a crisis situation, when less time is available, was suggested.

The session on managing conflict and negotiation (section 7 in the planning) was well evaluated.

As last time, participants really liked the session on chairing meetings (section 7 in the planning). Two persons suggested adapting the exercise to the context of an outbreak situation.

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The second part included a practical exercise on teleconferencing, also well evaluated. One comment suggested adding a discussion on ECDC's role in them.

Finally, the media management session (section 9) was very much liked by all participants, who really appreciated the practical experience of the interviews, the camera's and the press conference. The session was well prepared and instructive. Participants would have liked the opportunity to see their own taped interview (lack of time) to comment. The introduction was thought to have been a bit too fast and too condensed. It was suggested to spend less time on the introduction, and foresee more time on reviewing the interviews.

5. Team management

The general objective of this topic was to ensure the functioning of an efficient team. The specific objectives were 1) to assign and supervise tasks, 2) to achieve rapid team building and collective intelligence, 3) to acquire skills for negotiation and handling conflict and 4) to identify and handle stress.

Team management was specifically addressed during two sessions, although related issues came back in several of the other sessions as well. For the first session on teams and teamwork (section 6 in the planning) two practical exercises were organized, in which participants need to solve a problem together as one team. The second session was on self-management, during which Belbin's eight team roles were addressed.

Participants' feedback

The feedback on this session was again very positive, with the practical exercises as an excellent way to pass messages.

The second team session, managing myself and managing upwards (section 10 in the planning), was also very much appreciated, and the importance of the topic was recognized. The only comment referred to taking a bit more time on this.

IX. Recommendations

1. Participants

With 17 participants, the size of the group as well as the level of experience present provided a good basis for rich and interesting exchanges, with excellent group dynamics. All appreciated the opportunities for interaction with colleagues from Member States from all over Europe.

For only one participant, there was a discrepancy in terms of working experience compared to the target group. The concerned member state was contacted, but confirmed this person as the participant. While it didn't cause any problems, for group dynamics it would be better to avoid this, and aim as much as possible at participants of the similar experience level.

2. Planning

Some slight changes were made in the planning in comparison to the October session, mainly with relation to the writing of a "sitrep" and the teleconference session. No need for further changes was identified.

The work in small groups allows for active exchange of experiences between participants. One suggestion was to change the small groups a bit more regularly in order to stimulate more this type of exchange. On the other hand, an extra evening plenary session was included for this specific purpose.

Foreseeing one day with a more extended lunch break was again very much appreciated by all participants, especially considering the short period of light in the middle of winter. The snow outside was a wonderful extra attraction!

3. Arrival and expectations

It is useful for the participants to arrive on Sunday, in order to have more time available for the introductions and expectations. This should be followed up more actively with the missions department when flights are booked. The same is true for departures. The end of the training is scheduled at 15:00, which allows sufficient time for most (if not all) participants to still go home the same day, and avoid scattered departures still during the training session.

4. Course content

The major comment of the October session, related to the need for a better integration of the specific context of an outbreak response, i.e. management during a crisis situation, was taken into account as much as possible during this second session. There was more time for exchange of experience, specifically related to outbreak situations (a special extra evening session was organized), and the time allowed for discussing the personal cases in particular

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was very much appreciated. In addition, the chikungunya outbreak scenario was used from the first day and more consistently throughout the week.

At the same time, it was explained to the participants that some basic managerial skills are needed in order to then build further towards crisis management. Still, several comments from participants indicated that they expected more on management specifically in crisis situations, as the course is presented. This will need to be taken into account when developing the next series of training sessions.

Several remarks in the evaluations indicated the need to address more the involvement of the European level during outbreak response. It should be considered to add this extra dimension in the practical case studies.

Comments were made with regards to the level of English of some participants, for whom it might be better to give some handouts beforehand (if they want), for them to be able to read the text at their own pace.

Certain remarks referred to the duration of the course and whether or not it should be organized rather in several sequential shorter sessions. While this may allow more senior people to participate (in some of them), there is a risk that groups dynamics would be weakened.

X. Conclusions

As after the first session in October, participants agreed again that this training module clearly fills a gap in terms of needs in the Member States. The training was very well appreciated by all participants, who enjoyed the topics covered as well as the variation in the methodology used. The richness of the exchanges of experience and ideas on managerial issues and between peers proves to be an exceptional and valued opportunity for learning. There is no doubt that ECDC is on the right track with this training and that it should continue, even though some fine-tuning with regards to a more explicit focus on management in a crisis situation needs to be realized.

In addition, the idea of creating a learning group with the participants, to further develop and build on the managerial skills learned during this training should be taken forward. The people who participated in this training are extremely valuable for Europe, and the maintenance of this network should be facilitated by ECDC.

XI. Annex 1: Course planning

Day 1	a.m.	<p>Introduction to Course</p> <p><i>What I bring to the Role of Manager:</i> Management Styles Questionnaire</p>	<p>Section 1. Introduction to Leadership & Managing People</p> <p>What is leadership? What is Management?</p> <p>Management Styles</p> <p>Model of Management Main tasks of Manager</p>
	p.m.	<p>Practical Exercise to apply input from am 4 Cases (scenarios) Small group work</p>	<p>Section 2. Introduction to Case Work Prepared practical cases</p>
	p.m.	<p>How to select, prioritise, structure information</p>	<p>Section 3. Communication 1.</p> <p>Information Management: SITREP</p> <p>Reporting: Preparing and using field situation reports Preparing Briefings</p>
		<p>Evening Assignment: Writing my own real case</p>	<p>The management aspects of a real outbreak case.</p>
Day 2	a.m.	<p>Global tasks for Leader/Manager: <i>What I have to do in the real situation</i> Introduction of Overarching Outbreak Response Case Casework</p>	<p>Section 4. Setting Objectives and Managing Priorities</p> <p>Responsibility and Accountability Organising; Decision-making; Problem-Solving Macro Planning Delegation of Tasks</p>

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	<i>p.m.</i>	<p>The role of Communication in Leading and Managing People- (applied in the context of an outbreak situation)</p> <p>Roleplay Exercises: Demonstration in Plenary: practice in small groups</p>	<p>Section 5. Communication 2.</p> <p>Principles and techniques: Communication and Dialogue Giving and Receiving Feedback Communicating Decisions</p> <p>Skills practice clinic</p>
Day 3	<i>a.m.</i>	<p>Practical Exercise</p> <p>Small group work</p> <p>Questionnaire: Belbin</p>	<p>Section 6. Teams and Teamwork</p> <p>What is a Team? Stages of Team Development Creating your operational team Interdisciplinary Co-ordination Eight Team Roles</p>
	<i>p.m.</i>	<p>Questionnaire</p> <p>Small group work</p> <p>Utilising practical cases</p>	<p>Section 7. Communication 3.</p> <p>Managing Conflict/Disagreement Negotiation Skills practice clinic</p>
Day 4	<i>a.m.</i>	<p>Practical Exercise</p> <p>Practical Exercise</p>	<p>Section 8. Communication 4 Chairing and Managing Meetings</p> <p>Face-to-face group meetings</p> <p>Telephone & Video conferencing Preparation and follow-up</p>
	<i>p.m.</i>	<p>Expert from outside: Practical work in groups</p>	<p>Section 9. Communication 5</p> <p>Media Management Interviewing Techniques: media</p>
Day 5	<i>a.m.</i>	<p>Self Management skills</p> <p>Small group work</p>	<p>Section 10. Managing Myself</p> <p>Managing Upwards and Laterally Managing Time Managing Stress</p>
	<i>a.m.</i>	<p>Individual Exercise</p>	<p>Section 11. Action Planning</p>
	<i>p.m.</i>	<p>Course Closure</p>	<p>Section 12. Evaluation</p>

XII. Annex 2: Daily evaluation form

Session:

Trainer or facilitators were clear



Teaching material and methods were appropriate



Subject was useful



Subject was : too basic Ok too complicated
Time was : too short Ok too long

Strong points :

Weak points :

Suggestions :

XIII. Annex 3: Final evaluation form

Please indicate your views by circling the appropriate response to each question or statement

1. What were your objectives for this module?

2. How well were your objectives met?

Completely Well Partly Not very well Not at all

Comments

3. The published objectives of this module were:

4. How well were these objectives met?

Completely Well Partly Not very well Not at all

Comments

5. Event content

Practical relevance	Content covered	Level of content	Length of the module
Very relevant	Too much	Too advanced	Too long
Relevant	About right	About right	About right
Of little relevance	Too little	Too elementary	Too short

Comments and/or suggestions for improvement:

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8. What do you think of the organisational arrangements? In particular, how did you rate:

Pre-course information	1	2	3	4	5
Course invitation procedures	1	2	3	4	5
Training room facilities	1	2	3	4	5
Meals and refreshments	1	2	3	4	5

Comments and/or suggestions for improvement:

9. Would you recommend this course to colleagues? YES NO

Reasons:

10. What other comments do you have on this training programme?

Thank you for completing this document.