

Chronic Disease

Assignment Description

The New York State Department of Health Division of Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention (the Division) implements chronic disease and injury prevention programs to enhance opportunities for all New Yorkers to live more healthful lives. Major programs in the Division include tobacco control, cancer screening services, obesity prevention, cancer registry, diabetes prevention and control, healthy heart, healthy communities, injury prevention, asthma prevention and control, and others. The mission of the Division is to enhance opportunities for all New Yorkers to live more healthful lives by implementing integrated initiatives to promote social, environmental, policy and systems improvements that support health in all the places where New Yorkers live, play, work and learn.

There are four bureaus and one program within the Division: Bureau of Community Chronic Disease Prevention, Bureau of Chronic Disease Control, Bureau of Injury Prevention, Bureau of Chronic Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance, and the Tobacco Control Program. This Division is also responsible for surveillance of chronic diseases and with evaluating state-funded programs that aim to prevent or control chronic disease through the activities of the Bureau of Chronic Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance. Within the Bureau of Chronic Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance, there are seven teams. The Chronic Disease and Risk Factor Surveillance, Evaluation and Research Unit focuses on obesity, cardiovascular disease, disability and diabetes. The state's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System is housed within this unit. The Cancer Registry monitors cancer incidence to detect existing, emerging, and potential cancer problems; promotes research on the causes of cancer; provides data for targeting and evaluating cancer intervention activities and resources; provides information on cancer incidence to citizens, researchers, and health professionals; and submits data to national and international organizations for inclusion in publications of United States and world statistics. The Cancer Surveillance unit educates the public about cancers in their communities and investigates unusual patterns of cancers in collaboration with colleagues in the Center for Environmental Health. The Cancer Screening Research and Evaluation Unit promotes cancer prevention and early detection through surveillance and research and supports the activities of New York State Cancer Services Program which provides comprehensive breast, cervical and colorectal cancer screening services through a statewide network of partnerships. The Tobacco Surveillance, Evaluation, and Research Team collects and analyzes data focused on tobacco use and related behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes and also monitors rates of disease and death due to tobacco use. This Bureau also receives funding from CDC to conduct surveillance of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, and to evaluate the state's Comprehensive Cancer Control Program.

Day-to- Day Activities

The Fellow would in collaboration with Research Scientists, Program Research Specialists and Evaluators within the Bureau: He or she would attend meetings, become more familiar with the burden of chronic disease in New York through review of burden reports, and become familiar with the environmental systems and policy approaches to addressing chronic disease in New York State. Once oriented, he or she would work with Dr. Lillquist in accomplishing the following projects, or a project of the Fellow's own interest.

Potential Projects

(1) Disease surveillance is an important component of this Bureau's work. Another project would permit the Fellow to become actively involved with the Bureau's burden of chronic disease reporting. Currently, work is progressing on developing three individual reports for diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and overweight and obesity. Future crosscutting reports are planned around some topics shared by these diseases, such as mental health/quality of life, disability, cost and health care access. The Fellow would have an opportunity to participate in these surveillance reports.

(2) In addition, the Fellow could be of service in developing an additional crosscutting report focused on health disparities. This report would include an additional opportunity for research, data analysis and writing.

(3) An additional project could complement this health disparities report through a qualitative analysis of health disparities, targeting a local community to serve as an in-depth example of the statewide findings. We currently have county health departments with which to partner for this kind of experience.

(4) In addition to surveillance activities, this Bureau evaluates the various policy initiatives directed toward making healthy choices the easier choice, such as increasing taxes on cigarettes, or improving sodium content in congregate meal settings. Recently, there was an attempt to enact a statewide tax on sugar-sweetened beverages. This policy strategy to address obesity is likely to emerge again, and would provide the Fellow with an opportunity to conduct a policy analysis of this type of public health intervention.

(5) This Bureau also manages the data on low-income, medically underserved women provided with free breast and cervical cancer screening. A descriptive epidemiology study of who is being reached through this program is another potential project for the Fellow.

(6) There is also ongoing work exploring the relationship between the density of tobacco retailers, and youth smoking-related factors. The Fellow would also have an opportunity to assist in assessing the role of tobacco retailers in influencing youth attitudes and behaviors, and may participate in policy development and recommendations to continue to stem youth smoking.

(7) A cancer mapping initiative is also underway in the bureau, expected to be completed in December 2012. An important component of this work is preparing messaging to accompany the data to facilitate that the data presented are understood and interpreted clearly. This would be another potential area in which the Fellow could contribute.

Preparedness Role

The state's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System is housed within this unit. BRFSS routinely includes questions on emerging public health issues important to emergency preparedness. For example, past surveys have included questions on H1N1 immunizations that permit preparedness staff to assess their impact. The Fellow will have an opportunity to participate in data analysis of any emergent preparedness survey questions to be included in the BRFSS.

Assignment Location:

Albany, New York State

Primary Mentor:

Patricia Lillquist, PhD, MSW
Assistant Bureau Director
Bureau of Chronic Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance
NYS Department of Health

Secondary Mentor:

Barbara Wallace, MD, MSPH
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