

Improving Conceptual Understanding of Veterinary Public Health among Public Health Professionals and the Public

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Session: Oral

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Objective: Create concept maps to represent the understanding of veterinary public health among stakeholders using the Visual Understanding Environment (VUE) content mapping tool.

Background: Veterinary public health (VPH) is almost universally misunderstood among health services professionals and members of the public. Concept mapping applications can help to identify VPH stakeholders' conceptual understanding of VPH and the relationships among those concepts.

Materials and Methods: While numerous applications are available for locating digital information, few tools exist for selecting, organizing and making sense of available information. In 2004 Tufts University Information Technology-Academic Technology group developed an information management application called Visual Understanding Environment (VUE). VUE provides an interactive, concept mapping interface to digital resources accessed via the web. Its most common use is to assist individual faculty and students map relationships between digital content to capture and communicate concepts and ideas to improve teaching and learning. We used VUE with groups of veterinary, medical, and public health professionals and members of the public. Participants were asked to identify concepts of VPH and to describe relationships among those concepts. Concept maps were developed for each group of stakeholders.

Results: The process of creating the concept maps with all four stakeholder groups uncovered a narrow and disorganized view of VPH compared to the WHO definition. The group process alone was educational to participants.

Conclusions: The four concept maps will be used to identify barriers to improved understanding of VPH and to further develop a VPH program at Tufts. We anticipate that in the long term, this process will encourage members of the veterinary community to accept their roles as public health practitioners and members of other stakeholder groups to incorporate veterinarians into the public health system in greater measures.

Biographies:

Dr. Lindenmeyer (EIS '92) is Associate Professor of Public Health in the Department of Environmental and Population Health, Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine. She serves as liaison for veterinary students in the combined MPH Program. Her course on Public Health is a core course in the DVM curriculum, and she is developing selective courses on Outbreak Investigation, Surveillance, and Human Nutrition and Animal Health for the combined MPH Program. As a member of Tufts Global Health Initiative, she is engaged with faculty colleagues at the University Of Nairobi School Of Veterinary Medicine in the process of Curriculum CoDevelopment. Her research interests include the development and use of animal sentinels for human disease, the integration of human and animal surveillance, and identifying and overcoming barriers to veterinarian participation in public health systems. The latter work is being supported by a fellowship from Tufts' Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service.

Ms. St. James is a senior interactive media designer with the University Information Technology / Academic Technology group at Tufts University. Melanie's passion for supporting teaching and learning through interface and information design of educational technologies has led her to seek answers to the questions "how do learners really learn?" and "how can technology best support teachers and learners?" Melanie is a graduate from the Technology, Innovations and Education program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Melanie truly enjoys collaborating and consulting with faculty to bridge theory and practice to find useful solutions to instructional needs.
