

Barriers to Information Access among County Health Department Employees

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As part of a study to explore information use, 137 public health employees responded to the question: What are the main barriers that you face in accessing information you need to do your job? 74% of employees indicated 154 barriers. Of these 65% were related to technology or resources. Fewer barriers related to time (24%) and communication (13%). Efforts to address resource and technology barriers could improve how information is used by public health employees.

Introduction

The delivery of essential public health services depends on the effective use of relevant information by public health employees. Yet, despite the importance of information to the practice of public health, the complex information needs of the public health workforce are not well met.¹ As part of a feasibility study testing organizational network analysis in a public health department we asked the department's employees: *What are the main barriers that you face in accessing information that you need to do your job?*

Methods

Employees wrote in text responses to the question. The researchers used the open process of qualitative data exploration to identify, name, and categorize concepts and themes in the responses.² Four recurrent themes were identified. The criteria used to code responses into four themes were: 1. *Time*—any phrase indicating time needed to access information. Example: “turnaround time for sample analysis.” 2. *Technology*—any phrase that referred to using a technology product or tool, such as email, computers, databases, or electronic data. Example: “the database that the department uses is not efficient.” 3. *Resources*—any phrase that referred to accessing information, training or knowledge needed to do work, such as a physical resource like a computer or email service. Example: “cell phone not working in all areas.” 4. *Communication*—any phrase that referred to an exchange of information required to do work. Example: “when you call a state agency you are passed from person to person never getting an answer.” Two researchers independently coded responses. Each response was coded for every

category that applied. For example, the following barrier: “time to actually sit and retrieve information when you are new and unfamiliar w/ computer use” was considered a response in each of the first three categories. Seventy-eight percent agreement in coding was achieved between the two researchers. The researchers discussed areas of disagreement until a consensus of 100% agreement was reached.

Results

100 of 137 employees that answered the survey, or 74%, indicated they had barriers. A total of 154 barriers were indicated. Of these 65% were related to technology or resources. Fewer barriers were related to time (24%) and communication (13%). (Percents do not add to 100 due to rounding).

Barriers to information access	Number (%)
Employees (of 137 respondents) who indicated barriers	100 (74)
Number of barriers indicated	154 (100)
Barriers related to accessing Resources	50 (33)
Barriers related to using Technology	48 (32)
Barriers related to Time	37 (24)
Barriers related to Communication	19 (13)

Discussion

These findings suggest that public health managers who seek to improve how employees use information may find more success by addressing barriers to using technology and accessing resources, versus strategies aimed at freeing up employee time or improving general communication.

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References

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