



Communication to Key Stakeholders Regarding Continuing Education

June 25, 2009

For over 50 years, the Office of Continuing Education (OCE) as part of the Gillings School of Global Public Health has served North Carolina. The State has funded us to provide public health practitioners with relevant training and certificate education. We have partnered closely with both the Division of Public Health (DPH) and the Area Health Education Centers (AHECs). Last year in 2007-08 we served over 8400 local health practitioners in all 100 counties with over 100 educational programs. This year, even with the economic slowdown in 08-09 we have served over 5500 practitioners in all 100 counties attending over 80 educational programs. These public health practitioners are people who make our public health system work at the point of service in every county, every day.

This is an unprecedented and difficult time for North Carolina and the Division of Public Health (DPH). Budget cuts have had devastating effects on our ability to serve the State with non-degree training for practitioners. Whereas in the past, DPH has subsidized OCE's training of local health staff through contract support, unfortunately, they will not be able to support these activities. The implications of the current year's 5% budget reduction and the Division's contract reductions, as well as anticipated University budget reductions, have put OCE's education and training capacity and existing programs at serious risk. To date we have reduced our staff positions by five people and we stand to lose more capable staff with the next fiscal year's budget, thereby reducing our ability to serve the State and its public health practitioners.

As you might imagine, the reduction or elimination of state-mandated training for public health nurses will make an already critical public health nursing shortage even more severe--particularly in rural areas, where these nurses often provide the majority of public health clinical services and are frequently the only source of care for the medically indigent. The public health nursing training allows nurses to perform clinical breast, prostate, pap and pelvic exams; diagnose and treat STD's under standing orders; and perform well child checks. In addition, without rostered enhanced role nurses, health departments will not be able to bill Medicaid for these services, potentially reducing health department income. Current instructional programs affected include: the Introduction to Public Health Nursing, Child Health program, Physical Assessment of

Adults, Child Assessment, and Sexually Transmitted Diseases Nurse Clinician. OCE's nursing instructors have received notification that their funding will end in the fall, and our capacity to deliver nursing programs will be significantly reduced.

Environmental Health programs include authorization courses for environmental health specialists supported by the State of Practice (SOP) Committee. Examples include Child Daycare Sanitation, Basic Food Safety course, On-site Sewage, Basic Private Well Inspections, Health Law, and Lead Investigation and Remediation. We have reassigned staff from another program to enable us to continue environmental health programming until December. Beyond December 2009, our capability will be severely limited.

In addition, if our contract with DPH is cut, we will not have the ability to operate the Public Health Training and Information Network (PHTIN) system for any training or communication purpose.

As you may know, many of these programs are required to provide public health services. With our contracts cancelled by DHHS, we risk losing the capability to make programs available unless we increase enrollment fees significantly, which, in turn, will impact local budgets.

We plan to keep you updated on our status and capabilities on a monthly basis. As of June 10th, our current plans for the 2009-10 fiscal years are as follows:

- Our spending from State Accounts has been frozen, so we have limited program delivery financial capacity until the end of this fiscal year, June 30, 2009.
- OCE has reduced its staff by five positions in the last fiscal year. We are reformulating our pricing structure and planning to deliver a limited set of program offerings given our reduced staffing capabilities and changing cost structure.
- We must raise program fees to offset costs historically covered by DPH contracts. We realize this will increase the burden to local health department budgets for training key staff. However, without these additional funds, we cannot maintain the staff capacity to provide these education and certification services.
- We will attempt to deliver programs in partnership with the State of Practice Committee for environmental health specialists if locally based instructors are able to travel and the registrations enable us to cover the costs of staff, instruction and materials. Two summer environmental health programs have been cancelled.
- The PHTIN system will not be available for instructional programming from June 1 until we have a new contract, therefore limiting our distance learning and public health communication capabilities.