

## Strengthening disease surveillance and response in Tuvalu

Written by Zarin Khan

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17 Oct 2017 | Funafuti

This week fifteen health workers from Tuvalu began the first of five modules for the Postgraduate Certificate in Field Epidemiology (PGCFE), a capacity development programme delivered by the Pacific Community (SPC) together with partners from the Pacific Public Health Surveillance Network (PPHSN), including the World Health Organization and Hunter New England Local Health District in Australia.

During the training, participants will learn about the key requisites of a functional surveillance system and will perform self-assessments of the national surveillance systems in which they are involved.

With the PGCFE programme, they will gain new and strengthen previous skills in epidemiology science, including disease surveillance and outbreak response. They will also learn how to effectively collect, analyse, interpret, write situation reports and disseminate health data to inform interventions, decisions and policy development.

‘Tuvalu’s Ministry of Health is indebted to SPC for providing this important training for fifteen health workers from across a range of health professions,’ Tuvalu Health Planning and Management Adviser, Clare Whelan said. ‘the program will provide them with skills and knowledge that they can integrate into local practice culture in order to better maintain,

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strengthen and manage Tuvalu's national surveillance system.'

The group of Tuvalu health workers, all based at Princess Margaret Hospital, work in a variety of areas, including surveillance, statistics, health promotion, laboratory, environmental health and clinical services.

'This training is consistent with the Tuvalu Health Reform Strategy 2016-2019, which identified how the lack in quality data compilation and analysis frustrates health service reporting, planning, disease monitoring and surveillance. Development of minimum data sets for health service areas apart from the timely reporting and feedback to end users should be instituted', Mrs Whelan added.

SPC Team Leader of Surveillance, Operational Research and Response, Onofre Edwin Merilles Jr. said the training is designed to improve epidemiology and surveillance knowledge and strengthen practical and technical skills of health workers while contributing to the improvement of health systems by addressing health information improvement needs of the Ministry of Health.

'An added value of the PGCFE is that it is accredited by Fiji National University, thus health workers attending the training can become competent epidemiology technicians for the Pacific region ', Mr. Merilles Jr. added.

The first module on outbreak investigation and management is taking place this week (16-20 October) in Funafuti. Modules on public health surveillance and epidemiology will be organised in November, thanks to the partnership of SPC with other PPHSN members and the financial support of the German Development Bank (KfW).

The PGCFE programme consists of five modules in total. The last two modules will be organised in Tuvalu in 2018.

Media contacts

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