

Abstract

Assessment of Competencies of District Surveillance Officers, Iraq, 2017

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Abstract

Background: Communicable diseases (CDs) surveillance is vital for early detection of outbreak and reduce CDs burden. Surveillance officers at the grassroots up to the highest level should be adequately equipped with field epidemiology competencies. In Iraq, district surveillance officers (DSOs) are responsible for compiling, analysis of CDs data from Primary Healthcare Centers (PHCs) in their district and forwarded to the provincial level.

Objective: to assess background characteristics, qualifications and competencies of DSOs in Iraq.

Methods: In this cross-sectional study, we involved all DSOs (136) in Iraq. We developed a structured questionnaire through a meeting involved central and provincial officers and academia. The questionnaire gathered data on demographics, service characteristics, status of competencies in basic epidemiology, biostatistics, surveillance, outbreak investigation, rapid response to health incidence, laboratory models, developing scientific report and basic computers skills. Questionnaires were sent and received from DSOs via e-mails.

Results: Results The response rate was 85.3%. About half of DSOs was responsible for <10 PHCs, while only 13.8% were responsible for 20-29 centers. Also, about 55% were responsible for 1-2 hospitals and only 10% were responsible for 3-4 hospitals. Males constituted 78.4%. The highest academic degree of 63.4% was a two years Diploma after high school. The proportion of previous training of the DSOs was: basic surveillance 69.8%, outbreak investigation 34.5%, basic epidemiology 26.7%, rapid response to health incidents 21.6%, laboratory models 19.8%, biostatistics 13.8% and scientific reporting 8.6%. DSOs who didn't attend any training activity were 15.6%. Cholera and food poisoning were the most frequently reported incident and outbreak investigated (53.8% and 43.8% respectively). Microsoft Word was the most frequently reported computer skill (48.3%).

Conclusions: Although DSOs are the backbone in CDs surveillance, their technical capacities were sub-optimal. We started training of 25 DSOs (as first cohort) using a 3-months frontline FETP model.

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