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CANADIAN FIELD EPIDEMIOLOGY PROGRAM CALL FOR PLACEMENTS

COHORT 33

OCTOBER 2007 – AUGUST 2009

“Training through service”



The Canadian Field Epidemiology Program (CFEP) is now accepting placement applications for Cohort 33 (2007-2009). We invite you to consider whether you and your team could be an appropriate Field Epi placement site.

For those of you who have never worked with the program, we are pleased to provide you with background information on the Field Epi recruitment process, as well as some of our criteria and expectations of placements that will best support a Field Epi. Those of you already familiar with the program and our placement recruitment process can proceed directly to the [Placement Application](#).

Unlike co-op, summer or medical students, Field Epi's are full-time, salaried Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) employees. They come into the program with professional experience in public health or the health sector and are seeking specialty training from CFEP in applied public health that cannot be taught in a classroom or at a desk.

Field Epi Recruitment

People interested in becoming Field Epi's learn about the program through word of mouth, personal experiences working with a Field Epi, hearing about Field Epi investigations through CFEP seminars or other venues, attendance at promotional seminars by CFEP staff and/or through our website.

Field Epi's are selected through a competitive process that begins with a Call for Applicants advertised on our website each September. Candidate screening begins in October. The first phase of the screening looks at standard requirements (like citizenship) as well as educational/ professional qualifications: candidates who have completed all course work leading to a Masters level epidemiology/public health degree, or physicians licensed to practice in Canada. (There are two PSC classifications of Field Epi's: ES-04 and MOF-01; the distinguishing feature is whether the employee is

licensed to practice medicine in Canada – a requirement under the collective agreement for the MD-MOF Field Epis). The second phase of the screening process continues with a written emailed exam. Candidates passing the exam are subsequently invited to a personal interview. By the end of February 2007, we will have selected the Field Epis for the September 2007 – August 2009 cohort. Our approved budget and the number of successful candidates determine the number of positions offered each year; we aim to recruit ten Field Epis for the 2007-2009 cohort.

All Field Epi positions are funded by CFEP - we do not accept external funding to supplement additional positions. Our rationale for this is that in the past, some Field Epis were funded by their placements which occasionally resulted in competing priorities between CFEP and the sponsoring site. Because we are ultimately responsible for the Field Epis' training, EPI-AID deployments, and other administrative and financial matters, the only way to ensure that Field Epis meet all of our requirements is to have only CFEP-funded Field Epis.

Placement Site Recruitment

While we recruit the Field Epi, we also begin the process of placement recruitment. We are looking to attract new and existing placement sites across Canada, to include communicable and/or non-communicable disease activities, environmental health issues, animal/human health interactions, etc. We also want placements at all levels of public health in Canada – local health units, regional health authorities, provincial/territorial ministries of health, federal placements (e.g., Department of National Defence, Health Canada, PHAC), and others (e.g., university-affiliated organizations like the Research Group on Zoonotic Epidemiology and Public Health).

Placement Criteria

To assess the suitability of a potential placement, we ask interested supervisors to complete the [Placement Application](#) so we can assess the technical (supervision, scope of work) and administrative (physical environment, funding, support) aspects of the proposed placement site.

In considering a placement, we assess the depth of experience of the placement supervisor(s), as well as the depth and breadth of potential placement-related activities, including access to epidemiologic data, opportunities for field investigations, support for the evaluation of a health event under surveillance, the ability to provide ongoing assessment, and the nature and extent of support available to the Field Epi.

Placements should have a practical (applied epidemiology) mandate – placements focussed strictly on policy or that are research-based may have difficulties in identifying sufficient applied epidemiology opportunities. An appropriate placement site will have sufficient technical and administrative resources as well as a range of appropriate activities to support one Field Epi for two full years.

Occasionally, we receive Placement Applications from sites that are simply short-staffed. Field Epi's are not simply a pool of epidemiologists for local, provincial or federal public health departments. Placements must be prepared and staffed to support the training experience and CFEP goals. Although PHAC is committed to strengthening Canadian public health capacity, we avoid assigning a Field Epi to a placement that really just needs more full time staff. A fully staffed unit provides a richer experience to the Field Epi, spreads out the responsibility for supervision and teaching, better supports his or her activities and decision-making and ultimately provides the placement with better service. Field Epi's will gain the most in a setting that can provide optimal technical and administrative support, which permits them to enhance their skills and knowledge.

Technical Support

There are three key areas of technical suitability:

- A. Supervision
- B. Scope of placement-related activities
- C. Other available technical resources

A. Supervision

Over the years, Field Epidemiology Training Programs in many countries have found that **the single most important factor in a successful assignment is the placement supervisor**. The nature of supervision required for a given activity and the assigned level of responsibility will depend on the individual Field Epi and will vary over the course of the two years, but the requirement for supervision remains. We are looking for placement supervisors who are committed to training and working with the CFEP Office to maintain quality throughout the training period. Placements should demonstrate they can provide a stimulating training environment in which Field Epi's have good role models and mentors to guide them as they develop or enhance their public health careers.

The benefit of having a Field Epi comes at the cost of putting time into the investment. All potential supervisors should recognize that supervision of a Field Epi requires a

substantial commitment of their time, energy and intellect. This supervision requires a definite commitment of at least 10% of the supervisor's time (i.e., at least 1/2 day per week for two full years). For this reason, we require placements to identify an appropriate alternate supervisor for those times when the primary supervisor is unavailable. Senior public health managers (i.e., Chief Medical Officers of Health, Public Health Agency of Canada Directors) seldom have the time to directly supervise a Field Epi. However, we encourage their participation in ensuring that placements are suitable.

Placement supervisors and their alternates must be sufficiently competent in applied epidemiology to provide appropriate technical support to Field Epis. Supervisors should also be well established in the placement site and the broader public health community, to act as mentors for their Field Epis. Placement supervisors new to a position/organization may not be ready to mentor a Field Epi.

The most common reason for placement failure/inadequacy in recent years has been supervisor/staff turnover resulting in gaps in supervision and/or the loss of the Field Epi champion in the placement. While such events are not always predictable, we have modified our placement assessment to include more research into overall placement preparedness, range of supervision, workload and broader staff situation.

B. Scope of Activities

Professional Experience Guidelines (PEGs)

Placements should identify activities to develop the Field Epi's competencies in applied epidemiology. We require all Field Epi's to complete eight PEGs during their two years. The PEGs encourage the development of critical competencies in epidemiologic process, communication and professionalism. These guidelines are similar to those used in Field Epidemiology Training Programs around the world.

The PEGs:

1. Conduct at least one field investigation of a disease outbreak or other potentially serious public health problem that requires a rapid response. This can be infectious or non-infectious in nature, and should involve direct contact with persons affected. The Field Epi will become proficient in the conduct of outbreak investigations by assuming increasing responsibility for such field studies. Second year Field Epi's may have the opportunity to supervise first year Field Epi's or others in the field.
2. Design, conduct, and interpret an epidemiologic analysis of a new or existing database. Make appropriate public health recommendations based on the results of the analysis. The data set should be of sufficient size and complexity to allow assessment of potential confounders or effect modifiers.
3. Evaluate the surveillance of a health event relevant to their placement. Both the proposed evaluation plan and the results of the evaluation will be presented during the CFEP's Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons accredited Annual Surveillance Evaluation Workshop. For this learning objective, Field Epi's should not design a hypothetical surveillance system. The learning in this exercise comes from being able to assess the public health impact or contribution of an existing surveillance system to the 'real world'. Please refer to the [Guidelines for Evaluating a Health Event under Surveillance](#).
4. Submit for publication to a peer-review journal, a paper based on one of the above.
5. Submit a report to the *Canada Communicable Disease Report or Chronic*

Diseases in Canada.

6. Give an oral presentation at a seminar sponsored by CFEP or PHAC.
7. Prepare a presentation for a national or international scientific conference.
8. Respond appropriately to written or oral public health inquiries from the public, government officials, or other health professionals. Participate in the preparation of ministerial briefings and responses to media inquiries.

Together, the placement supervisor and the Field Epi should establish a work plan toward completing the eight PEGs. The Field Epi is also encouraged to develop and achieve personal learning objectives. In order for the Field Epi to receive adequate direction and feedback concerning his/her activities, the placement supervisor must be available, communicative, sensitive and responsive to the needs of the Field Epi. Field Epis are formally evaluated twice a year, including one face-to-face site visit by us at six and 18 months. During the site visits in April, we review the Field Epi's and the placement site performance. We will provide you and the Field Epis with tools to conduct the evaluations.

Evaluating a Health Event under Surveillance

The placement supervisor is responsible for guiding the Field Epi through the evaluation of a health event under surveillance (PEG #3). This project has well defined [guidelines](#) and deliverables. The placement supervisor (and/or surveillance evaluation supervisor) is also expected to attend the Field Epi's presentation during the annual Surveillance Evaluation Workshop (June 2008, May/June 2009).

"Training through service"

Field Epis already have epidemiologic knowledge and skills – they join our program to enrich their public health experience through a hands-on, in-the-field approach. Field Epis working continuously on routine tasks or working in isolation of 'content' professionals, risk losing interest in their placement-related activities. Placements that conduct field investigations of public health problems are especially prized by Field Epis hungry for applied epidemiology opportunities.

While we expect Field Epis to assist in placement-related field investigations throughout

their two years, we recognize that not all placements have sufficient field opportunities or the Field Epi may wish to expand his or her skills (e.g., participating in a national outbreak once they become accomplished in local investigations). In these circumstances, we will identify opportunities to deploy a Field Epi (see EPI-AIDs, below), to gain hands-on experience and fulfill their personal learning objectives.

EPI-AIDs

EPI-AIDs are requests for Field Epis for short-term (three weeks) or occasionally longer (up to three months) field assistance, usually, but not limited to, provision of epidemiologic assistance for acute outbreaks. Requests for [EPI-AIDs](#) follow a well-established [policy](#). Such requests may originate from:

- jurisdictions that do not have a Field Epi placed with them
- placements in which the assigned Field Epi is otherwise occupied or requires additional assistance
- international partners

Once a request is received by the CFEP office, a CFEP Program Director determines whether the request can be filled by a Field Epi. If so, and once we determine which Field Epi to deploy, a CFEP Program Director tries to contact the placement supervisor before deploying the Field Epi, to ensure that the Field Epi is not placed in the awkward position of having to negotiate his/her leave. On rare occasions the urgency of the situation requires leaving messages on the placement supervisor's phone and via email, while we make arrangements to deploy the Field Epi (e.g., if an EPI-AID request comes after hours and there is a need to begin deployment logistics immediately).

Once the Field Epi returns to their placement after an EPI-AID, it is common to continue working on the EPI-AID for several weeks. Within two weeks after their return, a trip report must be submitted to their CFEP Director. Additional epidemiological analysis may also be required and/or publications as per their PEGs.

The placement supervisor is not responsible for supervising the Field Epi during an EPI-

AID (unless this has been negotiated in the Terms of Reference). Their role is to support the “field” in Field Epi by assigning them placement-related activities which can be deferred or transferred to other staff when an EPI-AID request appears, and recognizing that they will be preoccupied with finishing EPI-AID related tasks upon their return to the placement.

For Field Epis with an interest in international field work, we try to find them an opportunity, usually in their second year. If they are accepted on a STOP polio mission, it means an absence from the placement for three months. Other international EPI-AIDS can range from 3-8 weeks.

Placement supervisors must be aware that Field Epis may be pulled out of their placements at any time to assist in field investigations (EPI-AIDs) outside of their placement jurisdiction.

Other Placement-Related Activities

Field Epis need something to do when they're not working on their surveillance evaluation project or a field investigation. Other placement activities for the Field Epi might include opportunities to follow up sporadic cases of communicable disease or respond to public enquiries, analyze surveillance data, design a new surveillance system for a special event/mass gathering or specific health event, participate in rounds, teaching/training, etc.

C. Other Technical Resources

The placement supervisor is also responsible for identifying appropriate placement-related technical resources for the Field Epi (e.g., GIS support) for placement-related work.

Administrative Support

Placements are expected to provide an appropriate physical environment (e.g., office space, computer, telephone, supplies) and secretarial support for the Field Epi. The placement must also financially and administratively support the Field Epi in their

placement-related activities, including field investigations and travel for placement-related work.

All these requirements are detailed in a [Memorandum of Agreement](#), a trilateral agreement between CFEP, the Field Epi and the placement.

What CFEP provides

We provide the Field Epis with a laptop computer and peripherals (for field work).

We financially support the Field Epi for EPI-AIDs and for CFEP-mandated training modules (e.g., three weeks for the *Epi in Action* course, seasonal training modules, training conferences, etc.). All CFEP-funded travel is managed by the CFEP administrative team.

Each year (May/June), primary placement supervisors are invited to our annual CFEP Supervisor Retreat and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons Accredited Annual CFEP Surveillance Evaluation Workshop, when both cohorts of Field Epis present their surveillance evaluation projects. Alternate supervisors are welcome to attend at their own expense.

Finally – we appreciate the work and commitment it takes to train our Field Epis. We welcome your participation to help us recruit new Field Epis as well as becoming facilitators in any CFEP training modules.

As we receive placement applications, we assess the suitability of each application. To this end, we may contact you personally to discuss areas of concern or for clarification. All suitable placements will be included in our Placement Catalogue.

If you are interested in becoming a Field Epi placement, please complete the [Placement Application](#). We prefer to receive online applications sent directly from our website; alternatively, you may email them to cfep@phac-aspc.gc.ca.

The deadline for placement applications is February 16, 2007.

The Match

The Placement Catalogue will be distributed to the incoming Field Epis in early March; at the same time, the curricula vitae of incoming Field Epis are distributed to potential placements. During March, both parties are encouraged to contact one another. Finally, each provides the CFEP with their ranked preferences.

The deadline for submitting ranked preferences is March 30, 2007.

As two years is a big commitment, we try to ensure the best fit between Field Epi, placement and supervisor. In determining the final match, we consider the rankings as well as our personal knowledge of the candidates and the placements. Our primary consideration is to assign each Field Epi to a placement that will develop his/her competencies to the fullest.

We will not assign a Field Epi to a placement where he/she has been employed prior to beginning the program. For example, a candidate currently working in the Surveillance and Risk Assessment Division, PHAC would NOT be matched to that placement site.

The rationale behind this is twofold: one objective of the program is to offer opportunities to expand the breadth of the Field Epi's professional experience (i.e., giving someone the opportunity to work at the provincial or local level if s/he only has federal experience); secondly, by placing someone in his/her usual workplace, we risk that some old work or roles may carry over into their Field Epi life, which may distract the Field Epi from working towards their PEGs.

In conducting the match, we also consider the personal or administrative restrictions on Field Epi relocation as well as our need to provide national, equitable and accessible

service to support all Canadian jurisdictions.

The match results for the 2007-2009 cohort will be announced by the end of April 2007.

Cohort 33 begins their two-year program in September 2007, with the three-week *Epidemiology in Action* Course in Ottawa.

The new Field Epis will report to their placements on October 1, 2007.

Summary of Placement Requirements

- Workplace committed to applied epidemiology (communicable, non-communicable, environmental health, animal/human health), particularly those with field investigation opportunities
- Appropriate health event(s) under surveillance within the scope of their placement
- Primary and Alternate Supervisors with appropriate public health/epi background
- Primary/Alternate Supervisors understand CFEP mandate and willing to support it
- Supervisors available ½ day per week
- Able to provide: technical resources (office, computer, phone, administrative support)
- Available funding for placement-related activities