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Georgia Southern Examines Urgent Challenges for Local Public Health Informatics

December 22, 2016



Good informatics improves public health. It enables public health agencies to be more responsive and productive. Improved accessibility to data can create more opportunities to improve health through partnerships, greater accountability, and improved efficiency. Informatics methods and approaches can address lack of timely data and enable quicker investigation of arising topics, from opioid abuse to factors related to school dropout.

The editorial discusses challenges to public health informatics while introducing the research articles in the special issue of the Journal of Public Health Management and Practice. The research articles in this supplement were based on a study led by Dr. Gulzar H. Shah, Associate Dean for Research at the Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health, Georgia Southern University, who also served as the lead guest editor for this supplement. The editorial also concluded based on the research in the supplement that the opportunity to improve informatics in LHDs serving populations of all sizes. But these research articles

also consistently demonstrate that large LHDs have significantly more capabilities in informatics and biosurveillance than do small LHDs. Of the approximately 2500 LHDs in the United States, about 140 serve populations of more than 500 000 whereas about 1500 serve populations of fewer than 50 000. Given that those large LHDs serve almost half of the country's population, it is vital to improve informatics in the large jurisdictions. This large LHD improvement is occurring through their own resources, federally sponsored fellowships, and grants. The LHDs with populations under 50 000 may serve less than 15% of our country's population, but improving their informatics is essential to building a resilient, responsive public health system.

This supplement clarifies the needs of these small LHDs. The prevalent practice of paper record-keeping discourages innovative use of information, decreases productivity, and hampers responsiveness. These LHDs face notable challenges around security, interoperability, and impacts of leadership changes. But as the Pomporaug District case study demonstrates, with stable leadership and consistent effort, small LHDs can improve their informatics. Other supplement studies indicate that shared governance models may also have factors associated with better informatics. This supplement contains indications of promising strategies.

“[Urgent Challenges for Local Public Health Informatics](#),” the editorial was published in the Journal of Public Health Management and Practice.

Dr. P. Joseph Gibson, Director of Epidemiology at Marion County Health and Hospital Corporation, was the lead author of the editorial. Dr. Gulzar Shah, Associate Dean of Research at the Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health Georgia Southern University was one of the co-authors.

Dr. Karl E. Peace Receives Notable Book Reviews

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Dr. Karl E. Peace, Professor of Biostatistics and Georgia Cancer Coalition Distinguished Cancer Scholar at the Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health Georgia Southern University, receives notable reviews (1,2) of one of his twelve published books.

This book aims to provide a thorough overview of the design, analysis, and interpretation of clinical trials in which the time to an event is the critical endpoint (e.g. death in cancer treatment studies; serious adverse event (AE) in drug safety studies). Although this book is a compilation of contributions by various authors, it is less heterogeneous than one might expect. However, being a compilation, this is not the standard textbook that you want to get in order to learn time-to-event analysis.

Several of the Chapters are written by Dr. Peace himself; e.g. Chapter 12. Using antibiotic trials as an example, he shows that some methods which compare the status of a patient at the end of a given time (in this example the micro-biological cure and the clinical cure) neglect the time to cure. Peace gives a practical example of a trial where the time to cure was taken into account. Overall a rather short chapter but a good reminder that when designing a trial one should ask the question “does time matter” more often.

Overall, this book provides a good overview of problems one may face when having to deal with time-to-event data and how these could be handled. Furthermore it gives examples of where time-to-event data are currently not analysed with time-to-event methods, notably AE data. Although there are some points for critique and some chapters fall behind others in terms of quality or appropriateness, and I feel that some topics would deserve more space, I would recommend this book to every practitioner who has to deal with time-to-event data. The reader can easily skip chapters that are not relevant but those chapters that are relevant will justify purchasing this book (1).

... One of the strengths of the book is the collection, discussion and illustration of the many diverse time-to-event problems that may occur in practice. ... this publication provides a comprehensive overview of classical and emerging ideas in the analysis of time-to-event problems. Written by experts in their area, the book has a wealth of references in each topic should the reader wish to learn about or extend their understanding of individual concepts or analysis methods. It is a worthwhile book to have in the library for anyone working in designing, conducting, analysing or interpreting studies with time-to-event outcomes (2).

1. Herpers, M (2016): Book Review of Design and Analysis of Time to Event Data with Time to Event Endpoints by Karl E. Peace. ISCB NEWS, pp. 30, 31, Number 61, June 16, 2016.
2. Australian & New Zealand Journal of Statistics, 2011: <https://www.crcpress.com/Design-and-Analysis-of-Clinical-Trials-with-Time-to-Event-Endpoints/Peace/p/book/9781420066395>