Making Public Health a Priority

Meet the ASQ Healthcare Division’s public health special interest group

By Grace L. Duffy

The Healthcare Division (HCD) of ASQ chartered the public health (PH) special interest group (SIG) to establish and grow a team of professionals focused on identifying, implementing and expanding the effectiveness of PH departments to support the local, national and global communities. Although ASQ has offered some collaborative opportunities for PH professionals in the past, there had not been a concerted effort within the HCD until spring 2013.

Major publications that support the PH body of knowledge include:

- **The Public Health Memory Jogger II** (Goal/QPC and the Public Health Foundation, 2007), which includes explanations of quality improvement tools using PH examples. This pocket guide is often used by U.S. PH departments for process and performance improvement activities and training.
- **The Public Health Quality Improvement Handbook** (ASQ Quality Press, 2009), which is frequently used in graduate-level public health programs.
- **Quality Function Deployment and Lean Six Sigma Applications in Public Health** (ASQ Quality Press, 2010) was published in support of advanced PH organizations that have progressed beyond the traditional plan-do-check-act approach toward continuous improvement.

The purpose and goals of the ASQ HCD PH SIG are:

- To provide a forum for professionals involved in the delivery of PH quality and effectiveness, patient care and administration.
- To operationalize, standardize and drive strategies to improve efficiency, capacity and agility in PH.
The PH SIG is still in the forming stage of its activities. It is formalizing a charter and establishing initial activities and projects. As of July 23, documented objectives included:

- Design and develop a template quality management system (QMS) for local PH departments.
- Provide preventive and proactive suggestions for healthcare that overlaps the QMS structure as it relates to PH.
- Integrate new legislative health standards into consideration for the template QMS and anticipate proactive community partnering methods.
- Engage in action-oriented activities to share information with the HCD and other ASQ membership communities. Activities may include training, webinars, learning events and other opportunities that show how to apply QMSs in real-world situations and teach participants related skills to support implementation.
- Partner with PH organizations such as Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB).
- Add quality improvement tools, techniques and templates to the HCD website.
- Author a whitepaper for ASQ to use to disseminate to other PH organizations and leaders.

Key stakeholders of the PH SIG outcomes are:

- The public.
- The ASQ HCD and partners, including the Quality Management Division, Lean Enterprise Division and Statistics Division.
- U.S. PH departments.
- Health units at the global level, although the initial scope of the PH SIG is the United States and a single set of established standards.
- PH nonprofit support organizations such as the ASTHO, NACCHO, PHAB and others.
- Hospitals, affordable care organizations and payers.
- Federal government agencies.
• Government and international health institutions.

Core team

The PH SIG is sponsored by the HCD. Core committee members and the areas of expertise represented include:

• Grace L. Duffy: PH SIG chair, lean Six Sigma Master Black Belt, ASQ-certified manager of quality/organizational excellence, quality auditor and quality improvement associate.
• Swami Reyes: expert in executive training, strategic management, revenue optimization, operational excellence, PH and nonprofit management.
• Vicente (Alberto) Araujo: quality manager for the Florida Health Department in Orange County.
• Grace Paranzino: specialist in process improvement methods, strategic planning, PH and academia.
• Donna Gillespie: member of Joint Commission leadership team with healthcare experience.
• Bruce Johnson: service provider for strategic planning, performance improvement, general healthcare, community health and social services.
• Annette Mercatante: medical care delivery, PH interventions and PH administration professional for St. Clair County, MI.
• Christina Bisson: seasoned professional with national and international PH experience.

Each core member offers specialized professional knowledge, skills and abilities related to current PH department standards and daily requirements either through direct leadership within a health department or as service providers to the industry. The ASQ HCD has provided a teleconference number the group uses for a monthly status and working sessions. Between calls, team members research current PH issues such as accreditation, performance improvement, capability resource balancing and sustainability.

Spread the word

Four marketing activities have been proposed to increase SIG visibility within the healthcare industry:
1. Promote joint seminars and workshops to:
   a. National and state professional associations for PH, behavioral health and other disciplines.
   b. Federal government agencies such as Health and Human Services and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.
   c. Governmental and private health and environmental institutions in the United States and around the world.

2. Write articles for ASQ and other association magazines and websites.

3. Provide communications promoting SIG seminars and services to these markets.

4. Continue to look for request-for-proposal opportunities with health departments to pilot and apply techniques developed by the committee in real time.

The PH SIG gauges its success by its ability to partner with municipal and state health departments to enhance their abilities to meet the increasing resource demands necessary to support their communities. Some tangible evidence of success will be in the form of project success stories, lessons learned, papers, conference presentations, webinars, books and other communication mechanisms available through multimedia channels.

ASQ and the HCD are fully aware that this is a volunteer team of professionals with limited time and resources to expend. We are grateful for the dedication of these highly skilled professionals who are sharing their time and knowledge with the PH community. The current deadline for releasing a working draft of the template PH QMS manual is the first quarter of 2014.

Get involved

Any ASQ member in good standing is eligible to become part of the PH SIG. The PH SIG also seeks a partner health department willing to pilot the QMS structure. Those interested should contact Grace Duffy, PH SIG chair, at grace683@outlook.com.