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Skills Enhancement: Using the online environment to transform public health practice in Canada

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ABSTRACT

The foundation for effective health surveillance in Canada is the ability to use and understand information. This requires some very specific skills. However, skills vary across the country and are limited in many public health jurisdictions. To fill this public health gap, it is necessary build human infrastructure to respond to community needs. As a leader in public health practice, the Public Health Agency of Canada's "Skills Enhancement" online continuing education program provides public health professionals in regional health authorities and local public health departments across Canada with the opportunity to acquire the skills necessary to do effective surveillance. In doing so, it will strengthen sound evidence-based decision-making and planning at the local level to protect and maintain the health of the public.

The Skills Enhancement program, a series of distance-learning, Internet-based training modules in both English and French, provides continuing, professional education opportunities for public health practitioners that may otherwise be unobtainable or unaffordable. Over 800 practitioners from regional health authorities across Canada have taken one or more of the modules, with more than half of those being nurses. With emphasis on the importance of utilizing a partnership approach, this paper will discuss the innovative process used to develop, implement and evaluate this continuing education initiative, and its benefits to practitioners and organizations to help improve the health of communities.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Carla Troy, National Manager for the Public Health Agency of Canada's "Skills Enhancement" continuing on-line education program, has many years of public health experience. She has worked at both the regional and provincial level in New Brunswick and Ontario. Carla is a Registered Nurse, and also has a Bachelor Degree in Education, a Masters in Community Health and Epidemiology from the University of Toronto and completed the two year Canadian Field Epidemiology Program.