

PICT Story



Many thanks to Dr Robert Haddock from Guam, who kindly agreed to share his point of view and experience on communicable disease surveillance with his PPHSN colleagues.

1) From your point of view, what is important to ensure routine surveillance of communicable diseases in a Pacific Island country/territory?

Continuity is important. If statistics are not collected in the same way using the same case definitions the data will not be comparable over time. Preservation, or archiving, of collected data is also important – compiling a comprehensive annual report is a good way to do this. Hopefully a public or school library will be willing to collect and preserve such reports (from my experience health departments are not always good at keeping such material). As I mentioned in an article published in *Pacific Health Dialog* (2005 Sept. 12(2): 121-6), 'The use of local and situation-appropriate surveillance methods and techniques is necessary if the information supplied to those responsible for protecting the health of Pacific Island communities is to be relevant and useful in making decisions. Although the islands of the Pacific are becoming increasingly sophisticated in the employment of modern technologies such as electronic communications and use of the computer, only those programs tailored to the realities of local resources will have a good chance of being successfully adopted and surviving the conflict between the perception of what is necessary and the realities of local economic and political pressures'.

2) As Epidemiologist for Guam for many years, what were your main day-to-day constraints?

For most of the 32 years that I served as Guam's Territorial Epidemiologist I had to do most of my own secretarial chores and data entry. I feel I might have been more productive if I had more assistance with some of those mundane but necessary duties.

3) Could you please describe some measures that you have undertaken during your career to resolve these problems?

Learning to use a computer and the CDC EpiInfo software program were probably the steps that assisted me most with my work.

4) I understand that you are now working on a book about the history of health on Guam. That sounds very interesting. Could you tell us a bit more about it?

Interesting that you ask about that as there is an SPC connection! This will be an update of a book published in 1973 titled 'A History of Health on Guam'. Of course, as an Epidemiologist I was always interested in collecting facts about health and disease on Guam but had never thought about compiling a formal history until about 1970. At that time SPC contacted me (as well as individuals in all the other SPC member countries) about a request from a professor at a New Zealand university, who was interested in compiling a text book about health in the Pacific and had proposed that each country compile a history for their respective area to be included as a chapter in the book. It took me about a year to complete the 'assignment' and submit it to SPC. After about another year I inquired if the book was available yet as I was very interested in obtaining a copy. I was told apologetically that the project had been cancelled as Guam was the only jurisdiction to submit a manuscript! More than a little disappointed with that turn of events I decided to have the book published locally. It was used as a supplemental text at the University of Guam for a time but has been out of print for many years. Used copies are occasionally available at amazon.com. I have found it very useful myself when I am asked questions about Guam health facts that I have difficulty remembering (e.g. when was the last time we had a case of ____?). I hope to have the updated version published in a year or two.

Interview by Christelle Lepers, SPC Surveillance Information Officer

