

BC Environmental and Occupational Health Research Network

Annual General Meeting

November 4, 2005 9:30-11:00 am

Holiday Inn, Vancouver Centre

Minutes

1. Progress Report from the Scientific Director Dr. Craig Stephen

Dr. Stephen presented a presentation on the activities of the Network since its inception in January 2005.

He began by outlining the purpose and goals of the Network as had been articulated in early planning documents to the funding agency, the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research.

“Purpose:

We support BC’s environmental and occupational health researchers by building linkages to foster a new approach to province-wide collaboration that will generate groundbreaking knowledge.

Goals:

- To increase the awareness of one’s collaborative community;
- To help members of the community come together;
- To attract and retain top quality researchers in the community;
- To increase EOH research activity in BC;
- To foster new knowledge to protect human health from threats arising in the environment and the workplace.”

From there, Dr. Stephen looked forward with material that spoke to the vision of a network.

“What should be hoped to be accomplished:

- A network is.....
 - Not a large research consortia
 - Not a club of like-minded enthusiasts
 - Not helping the same folks be better at the same things they have always done with the same people
- About creating novelty
 - Increasing the probability of accidental productive partnerships
 - New teams, new thinking, new opportunities
- The Network’s emphasis should be on researchers actively generating knowledge in an objective form”

He used an analogy of a fishing net to describe networks:

- “Well connected (knots) with many paths to others
- Provides a background of connections
- When the need arises, there is a peak in the net
 - The team that comes together via the connections
 - Lies flat when once the issue is dealt with”

At this point in the presentation, current members of the Board of Directors were asked to stand and be acknowledged.

- Craig Stephen, Malaspina University-College (Chair)
- Ray Copes, BC Centre for Disease Control
- Melissa Friesen, Student, University of British Columbia
- Rick Gallagher, BC Cancer Research Centre, Vancouver
- Henry Harder, University of Northern British Columbia
- Gabrielle McHugh, Student, University of Northern British Columbia
- Jack Nickel, Health Canada, Vancouver
- Corinne Ong, University of British Columbia
- Eleanor Setton, Student, University of Victoria
- Kay Teschke, University of British Columbia

Dr. Stephen explained the framework of the BCEOHRN's staffing model. The role of Scientific Director is part-time (0.2 FTE). The Associate Director, Dr. Henry Harder, located at the University of Northern British Columbia, is also part-time. The Executive Director, Pat Atherton, located in Victoria, is the only full-time position.

An update on membership as of November 3, 2005 was provided. Currently there are 200 members (154 researchers or students), 10 post-secondary and 27 other institutions being represented, with 70% from the Lower Mainland.

The accomplishments made in the first 10 months of the Network were outlined:

- "On track for all items in the work plan
- Year 1 Goal – finding the materials for the net and starting to weave
 - Personal contacts
 - Newsletter, brochure and poster
 - New website launched October 31
 - Start some team building (AGM, grants, workshop)
 - Membership increased from ~150 to ~200

Using funds to bring people together:

- \$7,200 awarded for 11 travel bursaries to attend this meeting
- \$20,000 for 2 research capacity development grants"

Dr. Stephen spent a few minutes addressing possible plans for the future.

- "Program planning
 - Team Building
 - 2nd and 3rd round of research development grants
 - Mentorship program
 - More detailed map of the community
 - Database of interest and expertise
 - More intimate engagement of members
 - More sub-committees, less board
 - More opportunities to come together, such as a major conference
- Philosophical planning
 - How to evaluate the network
 - For members, for funders, for users
 - No right way for jello to jiggle when prodded
 - Clear articulation of "why a network"
 - Help to refine tasks and plans
 - Fostering novelty and creativity in a conservative system
 - Make members and funders comfortable with new ways of working together"

Dr. Stephen then moved into the business portion of the meeting.

2. Board of Directors

Dr. Craig Stephen

2.1 Terms of Reference:

The proposed Terms of Reference for the Board of Directors of the Network were reviewed. These terms had been designed to ensure a truly regional balance and diversity of perspectives.

It is planned that year to year half of the Board will stay on to provide continuity and that half will cycle off to provide opportunities for new members. At this time, all members pro tem have agreed to stay on, with the exception of Corrine Ong, who has resigned from the Board.

A question arose about the time commitment expectations in being a Board member. It was explained that two to three hour long meetings are held quarterly, either face to face in Vancouver with travel costs reimbursed by the Network, or by teleconference. Other time commitments include email dialogues that amount to less than one day per month.

A question arose enquiring if Board members would be excluded from consideration as applicants for Research Capacity Development Grants. Dr. Stephen explained that as a friendly, honourable group trying to work together, being a member of the Board should not exclude individuals from grants opportunities through the Network. He articulated the need to ensure that applications be evaluated by third parties and that the present structure has provided for this safeguard.

A discussion followed regarding a change to the proposed Terms of Reference to set aside three positions for students and a minimum of six positions for researchers.

A vote was held and passed in ratifying the Terms of Reference of the Board.

2.2 Vacancies:

Members were asked to stand for consideration of vacant positions on the Board. One member of the research community, one member of the research user community and three students expressed interest in joining the Board.

Ratified were new members:

- Dr. Shannon Wagner, Assistant Professor, Disability Management Program, University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George
- Caroline Alexander, Drinking Water Leader, Northern Health Authority, Fort St. John

An election by ballot was held to select one of three student representatives to fill the remaining seat on the Board:

- Sulan Dai, PhD Candidate, Department of Geography, University of Victoria
- Carla MacLean, PhD Candidate, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria
- Glenys Webster, PhD Candidate, School of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene, University of British Columbia

Carla MacLean was elected to fill this last position.

3. Scientific Director Position

Dr. Craig Stephen

Dr. Stephen explained that he was stepping down as Interim Scientific Director and outlined the process of recruitment for an ongoing Scientific Director. An ad had been circulated broadly to all members, to interested others, and uploaded to the Network's website over the summer months

with an application deadline date of September 30. This process resulted in one applicant. One volunteer from the membership submitted their CV after the deadline date. The latter was recommended by the selection committee to the Board, who support this candidate.

This process was ratified by the membership.

Dr. Susan Kennedy was introduced as the ongoing Scientific Director of the BC Environmental and Occupational Health Research Network.

Dr. Kennedy introduced herself and discussed her enthusiasm for working with the membership to move the Network forward. She outlined her background (BA in English from UBC, PhD in Experimental Pathology from UBC, MSc and post-doctoral training in epidemiology from Harvard University). She noted that having worked her entire career in the field of occupational and environmental health research, she was extremely enthusiastic about this new opportunity to work with the Network to catalyse research across the province in these fields.

4. BCEOHRN Awards

**Dr. Craig Stephen
Dr. Shannon Wagner**

4.1 2005 Awards

The awardees of the 2005 BCEOHRN Research Capacity Development Grants were announced. The Evaluation Committee was comprised of:

- Dr. Craig Stephen (Chair)
- Dr. Tom Dickinson, Associate Vice-President, Research, Thompson Rivers University
- Dr. Shannon Wagner, Assistant Professor, Disability Management Program, University of Northern British Columbia

Awardees:

Glenys Webster

PhD Candidate, University of British Columbia, School of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene

Amount: \$10,030

Project: Influence of pre-natal PBDE exposures on fetal thyroid hormones. This is a pilot study involving occupational and environmental maternal clinical services and Department of Fisheries and Oceans toxicologists, with an intent to develop a CIHR proposal.

Carla MacLean

PhD Candidate, University of Victoria, Department of Psychology

Amount: \$9,629

Project: Exploring eye-witness testimony in the investigation of occupational injury or disease. This is in collaboration with St. Mary's University, Halifax, with an intent to develop a SSHRC proposal.

4.2 2006 Awards

An announcement was made of an offering of the 2006 BCEOHRN Research Capacity Development Grants, with a deadline date of February 28, 2006. Members were asked to spread the word about this opportunity.

5. Review of Funding

Dr. Henry Harder

Dr. Henry Harder, Associate Director of the Network and representative of the Network's financial secretariat, the University of Northern British Columbia, reviewed the budget plan for years 2-4 of

the Network (2006/07 to 2008/09). It was noted that funding from the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research has been secured for year 1 (2005/06) only, but that ratification was being sought in principle of the planned spending.

There being no questions, the budget plan was ratified by the membership.

6. Mentoring program

**Dr. Corrine Ong
Dr. Kay Teschke**

Drs. Ong and Teschke addressed the issue of a mentoring program. During initial consultations to form the BCEOHRN, one membership benefit that arose as a requested need by those consulted across the province was that of a mentorship program. They discussed mentorship programs as they have experienced them in other areas and noted that the Network needs to develop a working group to develop this program.

Some ideas from the floor included:

- UBC faculty assist with other regions' grant applications to benefit more researchers and new investigators;
- Provide broader reach outside of a researcher/new investigators' home institution;
- Grantsmanship to assist, for instance, with a particular call from CIHR;
- Content assistance with grants, reviews may be less necessary;
- Develop synergies with other MSFHR networks' mentorship programs;
- Use of website to improve communications;
- Increased formal gatherings within an institution to grow relationships in-house.

Volunteers for the Mentorship Working Group, under the chair of Drs. Teschke and Ong, are:

- Eileen Owen-Williams, Nurse Practitioner Program, University of Northern British Columbia
- Cheryl Peters, School of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene, University of British Columbia
- Eleanor Setton, Department of Geography, University of Victoria

7. Needs assessment

Dr. Craig Stephen

A needs assessment was distributed and members were asked to provide input to help drive the direction of their Network.

8. Acknowledgement

Dr. Kay Teschke

Dr. Teschke, on behalf of the Board and membership, acknowledged the significant contributions by Craig Stephen to develop the BC Environmental and Occupational Health Research Network, and thanked him for his dedication, vision and hard work in launching this significant new venture.