

DATE: November 18, 2004

SUBJECT: Tennessee College of Public Health Update

ACTION RECOMMENDED: Information

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: The latest State Health Rankings again emphasizes the need for improved public health in Tennessee. In the 2004 United Health Foundation “America’s Health: State Health Rankings” (<http://www.unitedhealthfoundation.org/shr.html>), Tennessee ranks 48th, down from 46th in 2003.

Through the effort of Tennessee higher education and the Tennessee Department of Health, significant progress is being made in the development of Tennessee’s academic public health with the objective to improve the health of the population by improving the education of public health professionals and conducting public health research and service. The entities listed below have provided the leadership for Tennessee academic public health over the last several years; this report describes the current activities of these entities and updates the current status of academic initiatives in public health in Tennessee.

East Tennessee State University has announced plans to establish an accredited college of public health and is proceeding with the necessary activities to accomplish this. ETSU currently has accredited programs in four of the required core areas of public health education and is in the process of establishing biostatistics, the fifth required core area.

ETSU has a practitioner emphasis and would fit well the designation proposed by the academic public health accrediting body [Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH)] of a professional degree which would be based on learning objectives and the types of positions its graduates pursue. The college with a practice focus would prepare students with a broad mastery of the subject matter and methods necessary in a field of practice and would require students to develop the capacity to organize, analyze, interpret and communicate knowledge in an applied manner. This certainly would in no way imply that ETSU would not pursue public health research, but rather that practitioner education would be the college’s primary focus.

Tennessee State University is working on the letter of intent for the MPH (Master of Public Health) program (an accredited public health program, not a college) and public health doctoral degree program. TSU plans to complete the letter of intent by the end of the fall semester for submission to the Tennessee Board of Regents for consideration. The leadership of the TSU academic public health has stated the strong intention to cooperate fully with other elements of Tennessee academic public health.

The University of Memphis and the University of Tennessee Health Science Center have agreed to pursue the establishment of an accredited collaborative college of public health based on their history of joint planning and collaboration and the proximity of the two institutions. The proposal by University of Memphis and University of Tennessee Health Science Center is that the University of Memphis will be the lead institution and will meet CEPH accreditation requirements for the lead institution. This college would likely have a research focus and would fit well the proposed CEPH designation of a research or academic degree program based on the program's learning objectives and the paths its graduates would follow. The college with a research focus would prepare students for scholarly careers, particularly in academia and other research settings. It would prepare students to investigate, acquire, organize, analyze and disseminate new knowledge in a discipline or field of study. As with ETSU the graduates of this collaborative college would not be exclusively engaged in research to the exclusion of practice, but rather research activity of the faculty and the preparation of students for research oriented positions would be the primary focus of the collaborative college. It is planned by the University of Memphis and UT Health Science Center to identify leadership for the proposed college by the end of November and then additional planning can proceed.

The University of Tennessee at Knoxville has discussed creating an "Institute for Public Health." It has been determined that there are not sufficient resources to create a college, but there are faculty with appropriate public health credentials in several college courses that could support the institute. There is strong interest to support the development of an "Institute" on the part of deans of several colleges and unit administrators including: education, health and human sciences; veterinary medicine; nursing; social work; education extension; and the medical sciences center. The leadership at UT Knoxville has stated that creation of an institute will not preclude participating in partnerships with other institutions within the state to pursue common purposes.

The Tennessee Public Health Workforce Development Consortium is a collaborative effort to offer certificate programs for workforce development for employees of the Tennessee Department of Health and other interested health care providers will continue. This is a collaborative effort of UT at Knoxville, UT Health Science Center and ETSU.

The Tennessee Department of Health is supportive of the development of academic public health in Tennessee. Commissioner Kenneth Robinson will not be able to attend the Commission meeting on November 18, but will make every effort to attend future meetings when academic public health is discussed. In addition, the Commissioner has suggested that the parties to academic public health have a meeting to discuss the formation of a "policy institute" associated with the academic public health activities in Tennessee. THEC will coordinate arranging such a meeting with the parties and the Commissioner will assist by requesting participation by national figures involved in public health institutes. The purpose of the meeting would be to have the universities and the public health faculty take leadership in establishing and defining the activities of the "policy institute". Examples of activities could be the development of policy statements to address evidence based medicine, health promotion, disease prevention, health benefit design, etc. This meeting would

address many of the same issues as the November 20, 2002 meeting of the Public Health Institute Planning Committee, except the objective of this meeting would not be the establishment of an independent organizational entity.

The THEC staff has had three meetings with the academic institutions and the Department of Health. The THEC staff has attended two meetings with Commissioner Robinson and several meetings with leaders of higher education. THEC staff has also visited ETSU, UT Knoxville, University of Memphis, and UT Health Science Center. One of the meetings with the institutions included Harrison Spencer, MD, President of the Association of Schools of Public Health which is the national association for academic public health. Dr. Spencer, at the Association's expense, participated extensively in discussions about the development of academic public health in Tennessee. He has offered to return to continue to assist in the development of Tennessee's academic public health.

The THEC staff will continue to monitor and provide leadership in the development of Tennessee academic public health.