NEW WHO HEALTH LEADERS TRAINING PROGRAM GETS MAJOR GRANT

The World Health Organization’s (WHO) new program to train the next generation of health leaders is now taking applications from around the world. The Health Leadership Service (HLS) aims to equip dozens of people to lead on improving public health, particularly in developing countries. A grant of $5 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation provides funding for this program over four years.

“We are delighted that this important work is beginning,” said Dr. Lee Jong-Wook, WHO Director General. “In the face of today’s global challenges of poverty, disease, and epidemics, there is an increasing demand for dynamic health leaders with sound technical skills. This program will help meet this demand.”

“We’re very pleased to support WHO’s efforts to develop a new generation of global health leaders,” said Dr. David Fleming, director of the Gates Foundation’s Global Health Strategies program. “By training some of the world’s brightest young public health professionals, the Health Leadership Service will help build a strong foundation for the future of health in the developing world.”

WHO is now accepting applications for the program for courses beginning early in 2005. The first phase of the program aims to train between eight and 10 young public health professionals over a two-year period. The funds will be used to enroll people who already have public-health-related backgrounds into a program that combines formal training with supervised practical work.

They will initially spend four weeks at WHO headquarters in Geneva and will then travel to one of WHO’s country or regional offices, where they will work on specific technical projects, supervised by WHO staff in countries and at headquarters. Candidates will work on a range of projects: from developing program plans for health interventions to field investigations of potentially serious public health problems including responding to epidemics and other emergencies. After several months in the field, the trainees will return to Geneva for a further two weeks of intensive study, followed by more work in a WHO country or regional office.

The focus of the service is to develop future health leaders who combine strong technical knowledge with management, strategic, and communications skills. Selected candidates will benefit from WHO’s wide access to national leaders and health experts at national and international levels. Graduating candidates will be encouraged to return to work in developing countries in ministries of health, nongovernmental organizations, and international organizations.

The HLS is advertising for the first group of candidates over the coming months. Qualified applicants will be under 38 years of age with an advanced degree in a field related to public health and work experience relevant to public health.

“Graduates from the HLS will acquire a unique combination of hands-on public health and leadership competencies through learning-by-doing. These skills will enable them to make invaluable contributions to overcoming the major health systems challenges in the years to come,” said Dr. Tim Evans, Assistant Director General, Evidence and Information for Policy at the WHO. (Source: WHO press release, August 24, 2004.)

FBI FALLS WAY BEHIND IN AL-Qaida SURVEILLANCE TRANSLATIONS

Despite increased funding and personnel, the FBI faces a substantial mounting backlog of untranslated surveillance material related to its terrorism and
espionage investigations, according to a new audit by the Justice Department.

The results of the audit were released in late September by Glenn A. Fine, the department’s inspector general. Findings indicate that more than one-third of al-Qaida intercepts were not reviewed within 12 hours of collection, as required by FBI Director Robert Mueller.

More than 123,000 hours of audiotapes associated with terrorist activity since 9/11 still had not been reviewed as of April 2004, according to the audit. In addition, more than 370,000 hours of surveillance tapes associated with counterintelligence had not been reviewed.

The backlog exists despite that fact that funding for the FBI’s language services increased from $21.5 million in fiscal 2001 to roughly $70 million in fiscal 2004. The number of linguists had risen from 883 to 1,214 over that period, the audit found, while electronic surveillance collection in key languages such as Arabic and Pashto has risen by 45 percent.

“It doesn’t do anyone any good for the FBI to have the terrorists’ attack plans in its hands but still not be able to see or hear what the plans are,” said Senator Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, a senior member of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The FBI also is not meeting Mueller’s requirement that all al-Qaida communications collected under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) be reviewed within 12 hours of interception. During an April 2004 surveillance period, the audit found that 36 percent of such communications authorized by the secret FISA court were not even received at FBI headquarters within 12 hours.

They also found the FBI still lacks the language personnel necessary to do all the needed translation work, and that technological problems, including limited computer storage capacity, contributed to the backlog problem.

“Three years after the worst terrorist attack on American soil, the overall effectiveness of a major investigative tool in our antiterrorism arsenal is still in doubt,” said Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont, senior Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee. “The Justice Department’s translation mess has become a chronic problem that has obvious implications for our national security.”

The audit made 18 recommendations for the FBI, many of which are already underway, according to Fine. The FBI is reportedly hiring linguists as quickly as possible who are versed in such languages as Arabic, Farsi, Pashto, Urdu, Chinese, Turkish, and Kurdish. One difficulty is that the Bureau has trouble finding qualified linguists who can pass required security clearances for sensitive terrorism and intelligence investigations, according to Mueller. But he also said FBI linguists are now connected worldwide so that someone in one office can work on information collected by another office far away.

“We agree with [the audit] that more remains to be done in our language services program, and we are giving this effort the highest priority,” Mueller concluded. (Source: AP news service, September 28, 2004.)
WCDM 2005 OPENS CALL FOR PAPERS

The Canadian Centre for Emergency Preparedness (CCEP) is calling for presentations for the 15th World Conference on Disaster Management (WCDM). The conference will be held at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, Toronto, Canada, from July 10-13, 2005.

WCDM is the premier annual event addressing issues common to all aspects of disaster and emergency management. The conference program includes speakers from many parts of the world and provides excellent opportunities for training and networking among those in emergency planning/management, emergency response, disaster management research, emergency communications, business continuity, risk management, security, human resources, and community planning, as well as for the organizations that supply and service these professions to showcase their products and talents. The 2005 conference is expected to attract over 1,500 delegates from Canada, the United States, and around the world.

The conference theme will be “The Changing Face of Disaster Management: Defining the New Normal.”

A major goal of the 15th WCDM is to challenge traditional concepts and methods and provide new ideas and approaches to problem solving as well as to provide opportunities for key individuals across the disaster management spectrum to connect and brainstorm those problems.

Presentations should fall into one or more of the following categories: 1) Real events/lessons learned; 2) Emerging trends in disaster management; 3) The human element in disaster management; 4) Technical issues/threats; 5) Disaster management principles and practices; and 6) Research and development.

A more detailed description of the conference and the call for papers is available on the WCDM Web site at www.wcdm.org. Presentation abstracts must be submitted by December 4, 2004. If you have any additional questions, contact Adrian Gordon at 905-331-2552 or email agordon@ccep.ca.

SENATE PASSES VOINOVICH AMENDMENT: $56 MILLION IN GRANTS AVAILABLE FOR EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

State and local emergency managers across the nation benefited today when the Senate passed amendments introduced by George Voinovich (R-Ohio) adding a total of $56 million for Emergency Management Performance Grants (EMPG) to S. 2537, the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Bill for 2005. This funding will help state and local emergency managers to prepare for, respond to, and recover from all hazards.

“On behalf of the nation’s counties, we would like to thank Senator Voinovich for his efforts to secure additional funding for EMPG,” said National Association of Counties (NACo) President Angelo Kyle. “EMPG is truly the most critical federal assistance available for state and local emergency managers.”

EMPG is the only program that supports state and local emergency all-hazards preparedness activities and provides a portion of costs to fund emergency management personnel at the state and local level. This flexible program was originally intended to reimburse up to 50 percent of the cost of operation of local emergency management and was chronically underfunded. The $56 million increase will bring the total for this program to $236 million and begin to address the $264 million shortfall.

State and local emergency management programs have been stretched thin by the demands for increased preparedness overall, and the increased call for preparedness against terrorism. While all disasters are local, recent disasters vividly show the need for national preparedness and personnel to support the mutual aid systems in place to assist states that are impacted by a disaster. The increases in EMPG funding will assist in these efforts.

“We are very grateful for the leadership of Senator Voinovich and appreciate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN), Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security Chairman, Thad Cochran (R-MS), and Ranking Member Robert C. Byrd (D-WV) for accepting the amendments,” said Daryl Spiewak, President of the International Association of Emergency Managers. (Source: National Emergency Management Association press release, September 25, 2004.)

RED CROSS STUDY SUGGESTS KIDS COULD USE MORE DISASTER TRAINING

Preliminary results from an American Red Cross study suggests kids could use more disaster training. Preliminary results from an American Red Cross study suggest that kids could benefit from more disaster training. Preliminary results from an American Red Cross study suggest that kids could benefit from more disaster training.
study suggest that students show no increase in disaster knowledge after the fifth grade. Researchers found that while kindergartners through fifth graders showed an increase in disaster knowledge every year until the fifth grade, disaster knowledge actually decreased as did the students’ overall ability to react to disaster situations after the fifth grade.

The findings come from The School Safety Initiative (SSI), a pilot study evaluating and measuring program delivery, components, and learning outcomes in the areas of prevention, preparedness, and response in the school environment. SSI serves as the prototype for the Red Cross’s “Together We Prepare” school program, which helps schools prevent, prepare for, and respond to violent incidents, natural disasters, and other emergencies.

Launched in October 2002, the Red Cross SSI study analyzes data from elementary, middle, and high school sites in eight cities. More than 10,000 students in kindergarten through grade 12, their teachers, and other school staff participated in the first phase of the multiyear study. Their knowledge, behavior, and attitudes around first aid, safety, disaster preparedness, and leadership ability were surveyed. Data collection in this phase included written surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews. Participants were from rural, suburban, and urban areas and of various ethnic and socioeconomic groups.

“Creating an evaluation tool like the School Safety Initiative is a real coup for the American Red Cross. It helps develop new ways and refine current practices in the area of school preparedness,” said Scott Conner, Vice President of Preparedness.

In addition to showing that disaster knowledge significantly declined after fifth grade, results also showed:

- Kindergarten through second grade students in urban schools had a significantly higher recall of the number to dial in an emergency (911). There was a significant leap in call 911 knowledge between kindergarten and first grade, indicating that this is probably the time when most students learn how to call 911.

- Age-appropriate awareness of first aid, disaster response, and general safety information was high among third through fifth graders.

- Knowledge of first aid and disaster response decreased slightly over time.

- First aid scores were consistently higher than disaster scores, indicating that first-aid training seems to still be taught in middle school and high school.

While the first phase of SSI looked at knowledge, behavior, and attitudes, Phase II will evaluate the effect of Red Cross resources.

For more information, visit the Web site at www.redcross.org/services/disaster. (Source: American Red Cross press release, September 29, 2004.)