Dissemination of timely national public health information

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The laboratory centre for disease control (LCDC) is unique in its ability to provide a national picture of incidence and mortality resulting from chronic and infectious diseases in Canada.

The Bureau of Communicable Disease Epidemiology conducts national surveillance and other special studies on infectious diseases, in addition to undertaking outbreak investigations. One of the methods for dissemination of this national public health information and research findings is through the Canada Communicable Disease Report, formerly entitled the Canada Diseases Weekly Report (CDWR).

CDWR was introduced in May 1975 in an attempt to achieve the rapid dissemination of disease control information to all those who need to know, specializing in disease surveillance, epidemic investigations, case histories, international health and immunization information. For almost two decades this publication was produced and distributed free of charge to over 10,000 public health professionals, both nationally and internationally. In 1991, however, because of increasing costs and budgetary restraints, it became necessary to consider alternative methods to make this publication available to its readers. As a result of the response to a market survey and several discussions with communications experts, CDWR was changed to a priced bi-monthly publication entitled the Canada Communicable Disease Report (CCDR) at the beginning of 1992.

At the same time, LCDC has also kept pace with the tremendous strides that have taken place in the past two decades in the electronic collection, transmission and analysis of data. In keeping with this evolution in technology, the centre has recently instituted another method to provide public and professional access to both domestic and international disease information: a fax database service entitled CCDR FaxLink.

Fax-accessible databases are a new form of data and information delivery, employing a fax machine's keypad and its ability to respond to an interactive voice system. By this means, universal access is offered to a wide variety of textual, tabular and graphically displayed data and information.

The CCDR FaxLink service can be accessed from any fax machine by dialing (613) 941-3900. Currently, users are offered a choice between the latest issue of the CCDR, an index to previous issues (to the beginning of 1992) and individual articles in those issues in both English and French. By the end of the year, archival access will be available to all past issues of the former CDWR, provided as a cumulative index categorized by subject area and cross-referenced. Moreover, the service will also provide access to travel-related information including late-breaking news from the World Health Organization, recommended immunization for travellers and current malaria prophylaxis, tropical health and travel updates, and a list of travellers' health centres across Canada. In addition, the quarterly update on the acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) case reporting will be available on the service, with a choice between the entire report or its individual components, along with a one-page quarterly update on the National Surveillance of Occupational Exposure to the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), guidelines for counselling HIV-exposed health care workers, a one-page summary of the global HIV/AIDS situation and a list of the provincial/territorial AIDS coordinators.

Therefore, LCDC, in keeping pace with evolving technology, can now provide access to timely public health information and will continuously add to or modify techniques and update information databases as they become available.

For information on how to subscribe to the CCDR, contact the Canada Communication Group-Publishing, Ottawa, Canada K1A 0S9, telephone (819) 956-4802 or Fax (819) 994-1498.

For additional information on accessing the FaxLink service, contact Eleanor Paulson, Editor, Canada Communicable Disease Report, Laboratory Centre for Disease Control, Tunney's Pasture, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0L2, telephone (613) 957-1788 or Fax (613) 998-6413.

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