

NEWS RELEASE

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Public Health Laboratories Develop Long-term LIMS Strategies

ATLANTA, August 10, 2004 — The Public Health Informatics Institute, the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL), and 23 state and local public health laboratories this month launched the final phase of a project to provide public health laboratories and APHL with the information they need to develop their long-term strategies for laboratory information management systems (LIMS) solutions. The two-year project, supported by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, cost approximately \$1.5 million. It is anticipated that the information it provides will result in savings to public health laboratories worth many times that amount.

In this phase of the project, the Institute will conduct a detailed analysis of the LIMS market, including forecasted costs, growth, and demand for LIMS, and the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to LIMS development and purchase. The information will empower PHLs to make informed decisions about the options available to them: buy, build, or collaboratively develop LIMS with other public health laboratories. In addition, it will provide APHL with the information needed to meet its strategic goal of moving public health laboratories to the cutting edge in the capture, processing, and communication of laboratory information vital to public health.

Also in this phase of the project, the participating public health laboratories will complete the collaborative development of LIMS logical design specifications that meet the needs of all public health laboratories. In previous phases, the project participants have collaboratively defined common requirements and developed design specifications for the most critical LIMS business processes.

The collaborative approach to developing LIMS systems requirements and design specifications reflects the Institute's belief that to develop effective information systems solutions, public health agencies must "think logically before thinking physically."

“Public health agencies looking to develop effective information systems can no longer afford to work in silos, nor can they afford to leap to the technology solution without first having a common understanding of the health problem and how the work gets done,” said Institute Director David Ross, ScD. “By developing a shared definition of the problem and collaboratively developing the requirements and logical design specifications, APHL and public health laboratories are tackling the problem of redundant health information systems that lack interoperability. The end result of the collaborative requirements and logical design projects will be more effective, more cost efficient LIMS that have better data flow among PHLs and to federal agencies. This will improve public health laboratories’ capacity to respond to bioterrorism and other public health threats and to provide mutual assistance in a crisis.”

The public health laboratory LIMS project began in October 2002 with a group of 16 state and local PHLs collaboratively defining common requirements. The Institute provided facilitation and expertise in business processes and requirements development. APHL published the resulting LIMS requirements document, which details 500 requirements, in November 2003. A number of public health laboratories across the country have used the requirements to guide their LIMS development or purchase. A document with the logical design specifications for the most critical business processes, collaboratively developed by public health laboratories in 25 states and one city, will be published by APHL in fall 2004. A document detailing the design specifications for the remaining business process will be ready in early 2005.

The 23 state and local public health laboratories collaborating in the final phase of the project are: Alaska; Arizona; Arkansas; Colorado; Hawaii; Iowa; Kansas; Louisiana; Maine; Maryland; Massachusetts; Minnesota; Missouri; New York; New York City; Erie County, Buffalo, New York; Canton, Ohio; Oregon, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

The Public Health Informatics Institute is a non-profit entity dedicated to advancing public health practitioners’ ability to strategically apply and manage information systems. The Institute’s goal is to foster effective health information systems through collaboration, innovation, and action.

APHL has represented the interests of public health laboratories and the communities they serve for the last 50 years. The association shapes public health policy and provides training and technical assistance to support public health laboratories in a new and challenging environment. Its informatics program aims to move public health laboratories to the cutting edge in the capture, processing and communication of laboratory information vital to public health.

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