Be accessible and credible
Be friendly (even during Ebola scares)
Provide good “art” and “B-roll”
Create opportunities to educate
Seek Assistance

- Develop relationship with Communications Office / Media Training
- Collaborate with APHL

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Finding a state facing difficulties is as easy as throwing a dart at the map of the US. The State Public Health Laboratory located in Honolulu, Hawaii, is a prime example of the nationwide shortage. Hawaii faces unique issues due to its geography, location and size.

Funding cuts and budget shortfalls underlie most of the state’s issues. However, it isn’t just decreasing funds, but many costs leading to the problems. Since 2008, Hawaii state resources have been in mandatory furloughs for two days each month, which meant the federal grant money they saved during the furlough was sent back to the original funders. Funding reductions also led to lost staff and vacancies. Public Health Laboratory Director Dr. Christian Whelen now wears the hats of part-time public health administrative officer, laboratory manager, budget/contracts manager, building supervisor and also leads Information Technology efforts.

Due to furloughs and funding reductions, laboratory capacity is threatened and has caused Dr. Whelen to make tough decisions to carry out essential testing. Laboratory leadership has made difficult choices to continue lab services over losing essential equipment vital to the laboratory buildings, such as HPA units. General laboratory capacity has been lost, and preparedness activities have only been saved by HPPD funding. Given the uncertainty of the next round of federal budgets and the already proposed cuts to the HPPD Cooperative Agreement, this is a recipe for disaster. Even if the money coming in remains stable, increasing costs of facility rental, grounds maintenance and utilities threaten to make life more difficult for the Hawaii Public Health Laboratory.

Living in a vacation destination has its share of ups and downs. Staff are not complaining about the location of the facilities, but it is the wonderful location that brings its own share of issues. Hawaii has approximately 1.3 million residents, but averages a whopping 7 million tourists. The added complication of frequent travel between surrounding island communities brings an even greater increase risk for disease spread. Being that the island is located in the middle of the Pacific Ocean also causes its own obstacles because it is difficult to receive assistance or surge capacity from other public health laboratories in the LPR. Also, as soon during the Tsunamin of March 2011, climate changes and Mother Nature can drastically affect this population.

On the bright side, the remaining laboratory staff are dedicated to the public health mission and island residents. Also, because it is a close knit community, private, military and corporate laboratories have formed a strong bond to offer each other assistance and share limited staff. This laboratory has been able to partner with the Department of Defense for surge testing and has become a central testing station for other Pacific islands. So, for now, Hawaii, like the other 49 states, is hanging on.

PATH TO PUBLIC HEALTH: “THE BEST LAB JOB IN HAWAII”

by Nancy Maddox, writer, and Laura Siegel, associate specialist, communications

A. Christian Whelen, administrator and scientific director of the Hawaii State Laboratories Division (HSLD), is not your typical laboratory director. From breaking collegiate gymnastic records to helping his lab win “Department of Health Team of the Year” during an economic downturn, Whelen is accomplished at beating the odds and going against the grain of the world. He later conducted research into new anti-malarial agents at Walter Reed Army Institute of Research and was assigned to the Pentagon as the Executive Officer to the Army Chief Scientist who controlled the $1.6 billion Army science and technology portfolio. A month after 9/11 and in the midst of the anthrax attacks, Whelen was tasked to the Army Operations Center and assigned to the Pentagon Force Protection Agency as an expert in biological agent defense and detection. In another milestone, Whelen was the first Army microbiologist authorized to pursue a clinical post-doctoral fellowship. During his fellowship at Mayo Clinic, he developed a rapid PCR assay for direct detection of rifampin-resistant M. tuberculosis in clinical specimens and shares the patent for this novel diagnostic technology.

June 2011 / Summer 2011
Have a “cool” website
Consider an “Open House”
Communicate in a familiar form

Who we are...
The State and 3 District Labs are staffed with...
- 33 Microbiologists
- 23 Chemists
- 15 Support Staff
- 11 Laboratory Assistants
- 6 Air Quality Technicians
- 4 Quality Managers
- 2 Medical Lab Techs
- 3 Interns

Where we live...
- Ewa Beach (3)
- Honolulu (9)
- Kaimuki (3)
- Pearl City (4)
- Moanalua (3)
- Waipahu (10)
- Mililani (7)
- Big Island (4)
- Kauai (3)
- Maui (3)
- Kaneohe (4)
- Kapolei (5)
- Nuuanu (2)
- Waimanalo
- Makakilo
- Manoa
- Waikiki
- Waipio
- Kailua
- Kalihi
- Aiea
- Ewa
CSI – Hawaii DOH Style

Now, that’s a suspicious character

Better collect some evidence

No cows were harmed in the pursuit of this investigation
Video Clips

- Hawaii Molasses Spill
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BctL0-xv5d4

- State Lab response to spill
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WJU1sDahvo

- Hawaii Five-O meets Hawaii State Labs
Questions (and lively discussion) at the end

Mahalo