

TAILORING THE *BULLETIN* TO MEET READERSHIP NEEDS

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Commencing with the January–February 2007 issue, the *NSW Public Health Bulletin* will have a new look. This coincides with CSIRO Publishing becoming responsible for producing the print and electronic versions of the *Bulletin*. The *Bulletin* editorial team at the NSW Department of Health retains responsibility for strategic direction, the management of the peer-review process and the selection of articles for publication. Consequently, this issue will be the last to appear in the design that has identified the *Bulletin* since it began in May 1990.¹ At this appropriate moment for reflection, four articles in this issue describe recent developments that have informed the evolution and future directions of the *Bulletin*.

A completely revised cumulative subject index accompanies this issue. This was a major project. The new index has increased specificity to reduce search time. In addition, the online version of the index will be updated for each issue from January–February 2007 onwards, rather than annually. The article ‘The new subject index for the *NSW Public Health Bulletin*’ describes the features of the new index.

Since the mid-1990s the *Bulletin* has been available online in PDF format via the NSW Department of Health’s Internet site, and in 1999 the earlier issues of the *Bulletin* were also made available in PDF format online. An HTML version was launched in September 2001. In 2003 the patterns of electronic use of both the PDF and HTML formats were analysed following examination of 29 months of web logs. Web logs automatically record use of a website, including user identification information and the time and content of the information accessed. The method developed for this analysis and the findings are described in ‘A web log analysis of the online *NSW Public Health Bulletin* for 2001–2003’.

continued on page 162

CONTENTS

- 161 Tailoring the *Bulletin* to meet readership needs
- 163 The new subject index for the *NSW Public Health Bulletin*
- 166 A web log analysis of the online *NSW Public Health Bulletin* for 2001–2003
- 175 Review of the *NSW Public Health Bulletin*: A qualitative survey of stakeholders
- 177 Results from the 2000 fax-back survey to readers about the *NSW Public Health Bulletin*
-
- 180 Bug Breakfast in the *Bulletin*: Epidemic keratoconjunctivitis: An outbreak in New South Wales
-
- 181 *FactSheet*: Epidemic Keratoconjunctivitis
-
- 182 Communicable Diseases Report, New South Wales, for September and October 2006
-
- 187 Subject and author indexes
- 187 Subject index 1990–2006
- 238 Author index 2006

The analysis demonstrated the substantial growth in electronic access from 8000 hits each month in 2001 to 21,000 in 2003. The analysis provided the first picture of the use of the electronic *Bulletin* and identified factors that might enhance this.

Approximately every five years the *Bulletin* undertakes some form of external consultation with its readership to ensure that it continues to fulfil its purpose. In 2000 the *Bulletin* released a discussion paper that considered all aspects of the *Bulletin*: content, distribution, and editorial management.² This was intended to stimulate broad discussion about the role of the *Bulletin*, including the span of its aims and objectives. The discussion paper was sent to 1200 people in NSW with a short questionnaire seeking feedback on the *Bulletin* in general and on the discussion paper's recommendations. 'Results from the 2000 fax-back survey to readers about the *NSW Public Health Bulletin*' briefly describes the findings from this survey and the changes implemented in response to the recommendations. Many of these changes paved the way to a successful application by the *Bulletin* for inclusion in Medline in February 2002.³

Inclusion in Medline is highly valued by contributors. This was one finding of an external review of the *Bulletin* that was conducted in 2005. Reasons cited for the importance of this included that it: is seen as a measure of the journal's quality and thereby adds status to the *Bulletin*; increases the accessibility and international exposure for articles published; and helps showcase public health issues and endeavours in NSW. Maintaining indexing with Medline was a recommendation of the review.

The 2005 review was overseen by an external advisory group with representation from population health structures in the area health services and from the NSW Department of Health. The review was in two parts: the first part was a quantitative survey to describe the current distribution of the *Bulletin* and the second was a qualitative survey of stakeholders. The themes that emerged from the second part, which involved fifty individual interviews and two focus groups, are described in 'Review of the *NSW Public Health Bulletin*: A qualitative survey of stakeholders'. The review demonstrated that the *Bulletin* continues to make an important and unique contribution to the practice of public health in NSW. It is a significant source of information for many workers and is seen to foster and build the evidence base in public health and encourage rigour in research and practice. In particular it is a mechanism that draws together and connects the public health workforce in NSW.

The *Bulletin* editorial team was particularly pleased to see the review describe a positive sense of 'ownership' amongst the readership. The review produced many suggestions on ways to improve the *Bulletin*; including improving the timeliness of production and developing a distribution

strategy. The recommendations from this review and those of an external review of the *Bulletin*'s production processes, undertaken by an experienced science editor around the same time, have led to further changes, including the move to CSIRO Publishing.

Some contributors to the 2005 review felt that the design of the *Bulletin* was looking dated. Consequently, as a first step the *Bulletin* editorial team has worked with CSIRO Publishing to refresh the design.

Another recommendation was for a strategy for enhanced electronic distribution. With the January–February 2007 issue, CSIRO Publishing also will host the *Bulletin*'s new website (at www.publish.csiro.au/journals/phb). This will facilitate rapid electronic publication before distribution of the printed version. The timeliness of electronic publication, with links to PubMed, will help the *Bulletin* to maintain Medline status. *Bulletin* articles will also be fully indexed in Google and other search engines.

Another new feature provided to *Bulletin* readers by the new website are counts of the number of downloads of papers, providing a measure of the popularity of papers. This will also assist the Editor to identify topics of current interest and, therefore, potential areas to be expanded in future issues of the *Bulletin*.

All these developments and others are designed to help readers to access information and to communicate what they are doing. This is particularly important in public health and in healthcare in general, a knowledge-intensive industry that requires high quality evidence to inform action. The *Bulletin* strives to be a strategic tool for the public health workforce in NSW, allowing the transfer of knowledge that is vital to building an understanding of what works and what doesn't.⁴

The *Bulletin* editorial team offers sincere thanks to everyone who has participated in providing feedback to the *Bulletin* over the years. We hope that you enjoy this issue and are able to recognise areas to which you have made a contribution. We invite you to keep the dialogue around the *Bulletin* alive and productive, and we look forward in 2007 to working with a new Editorial Advisory Committee to further strengthen the *Bulletin*.

REFERENCES

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