Some Thoughts on Surveillance Using Mortality Data

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Mortality surveillance is what exactly?

Two goals in mind…

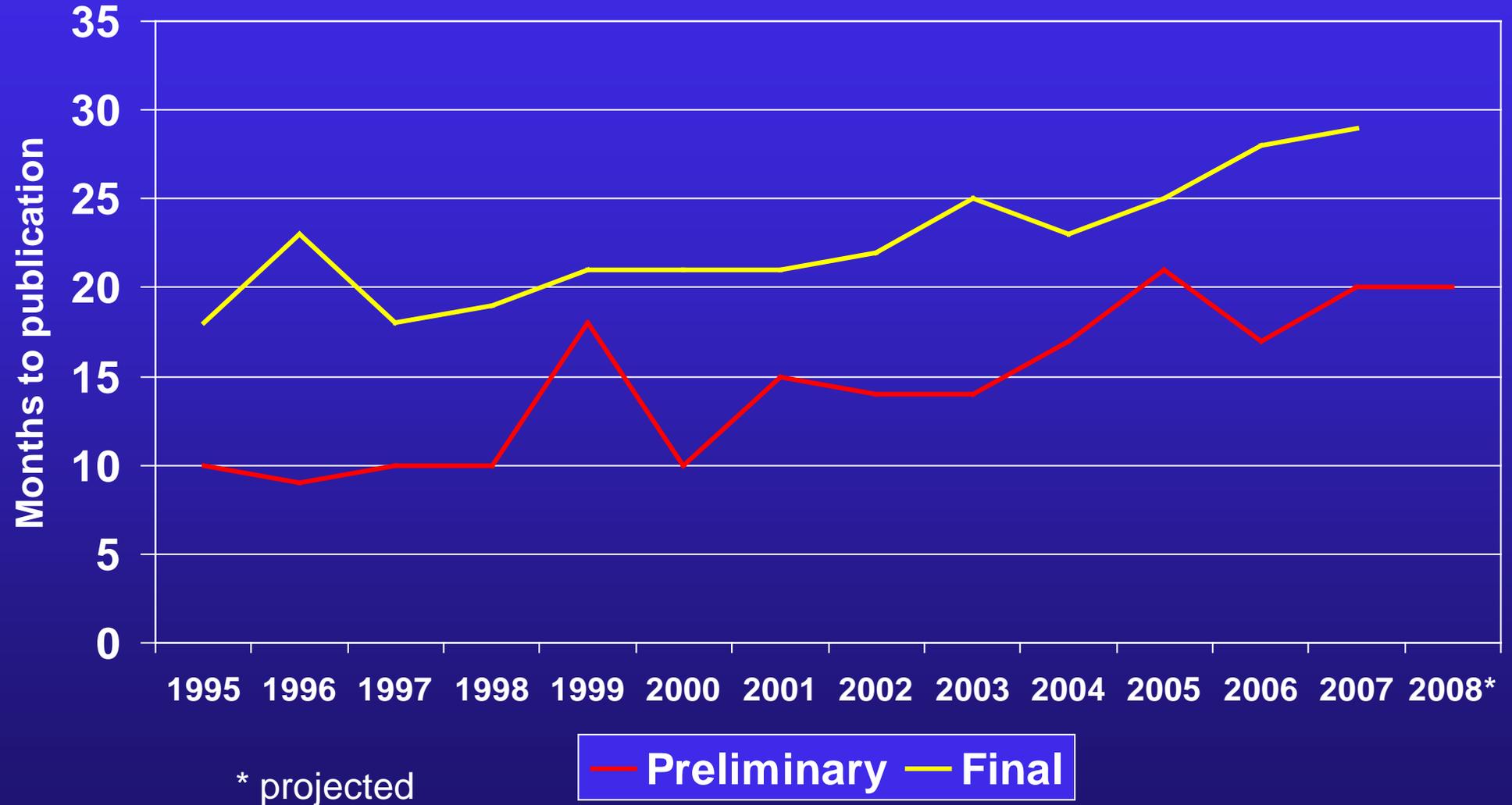…monitoring deaths, both overall and disease-specific

…monitoring data quality

Timeliness…

…is the key to mortality surveillance

…has deteriorated over the past several years

Number of Months from End of Data Year to Publication/Data Release

How do we shorten this time frame?

- Reengineering systems for:
  - Data collection
  - Data processing
  - Analysis
- Electronic death registration (EDR) systems

Electronic Death Registration

- Potential to dramatically improve timeliness and quality
  - Data entry at the source
  - Timely queries back to the certifier
- Systems currently functioning in many states
  - Coverage in these areas is typically substantially less than 100%
  - Cause of death – challenges getting physicians to certify electronically

What is possible with EDR systems?

- New Hampshire pilot

  - Median time from date of death to receipt at NCHS (COD not coded) – *4 days*

- Other states with EDR systems report an ability to transmit data within 1 week

Timeliness goals

- Transmission of data, including COD, within 25 days of registration

- Goal is for all states regardless whether they have an EDR or not

- EDR states are expected to be faster – many will be participating in a pilot surveillance project and are expected to deliver in 5 days

Cause of Death Certification

- Disease-specific surveillance requires accurate COD reporting

- Problems include:
  - Lack of specificity
  - Ill-defined conditions
  - Terminal conditions/Non-specific processes as the underlying COD
  - Poorly conceived sequences

What can we do to improve COD quality?

- Physician education
  - In-person seminars
  - E-learning

- Querying the certifier

- Facilitate access to health records

- Methods for collecting COD information

Once timely data are available for surveillance…

…what do we do with it?

…how do we analyze it?

…how do we disseminate it?

Some thoughts

- More timely publication of mortality statistics

- Adopting a surveillance mentality

- Need for methods for analyzing incomplete data

- How frequently do we release data?
  …monthly?   …quarterly?
  …and in what format?
  …how much detail?

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Mortality online

http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/deaths.htm

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