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

* projected

Preliminary
Final
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?
National Center for Health Statistics
Mortality online

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

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