



October 1, 2015

Dear Colleagues,

As we recognize the fourth National Disease Intervention Specialist Recognition Day, it is a time to show sincere gratitude for the outstanding contributions of Disease Intervention Specialists (DIS) to protect the public's health in communities throughout the nation and abroad. These public health professionals have ground-level investigative skills that have become key components of STD partner services, TB outbreak response, HIV exposure notification, other infectious disease control efforts, and—especially this year—emergency response. DIS develop expertise in essential skills such as communication, interviewing, counseling, case analysis, and provider and community engagement.

It has been an exceptionally busy year for DIS. On January 23, 2015, the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) began investigation and control efforts for an outbreak of HIV infection, after an Indiana DIS reported 11 confirmed HIV cases traced to a rural county in southeastern Indiana. By April, ISDH had diagnosed HIV infection in 181 individuals in a community of only 4,200 people. A public health emergency was declared by executive order and DIS throughout the country immediately answered the call to assist. Contact tracing by state, local, and CDC DIS played a crucial role in identifying those potentially exposed. Ultimately, ISDH reported a total of 49 DIS from other states coming to assist with their outbreak—26 were CDC field staff, 23 were state or local staff. DIS don't only respond

domestically. More than 65 PHA DIS from CDC alone were deployed to the Ebola response beginning in 2014. These outbreak responses are a true testament to the adaptability and commitment of our nation's DIS.

In order to enhance the public health services provided to communities, and support training and capacity building of DIS, the ongoing DIS Certification Project continues to progress. The project is being coordinated by the Public Health Accreditation Board, in partnership with CDC, the National Association of County and City Health Officials, the National Coalition of STD Directors, and with support from national consultants in certification. This is a comprehensive, inclusive effort to develop recommendations to strengthen and formalize the role of DIS in areas such as STD, HIV, TB, Ebola and other communicable diseases, as well as emergency preparedness and response. Several deliverables will result from this project, including a job task analysis to provide a template DIS job description; enumeration of the DIS workforce; establishment of a national registry for DIS; and development of three potential models for DIS certification; all of which will inform a comprehensive framework for future DIS training. CDC and all of our partners involved with the project are incredibly excited about offering a high quality, standardized approach to the professional development of DIS in the coming years.

We are also pleased to announce that there were 278 new DIS trained in the last year by the Disease Intervention Services Training Center, and introduced a new tool for DIS. The VCAmon application is a computer application that performs Visual Case Analysis (VCA). DIS have performed VCA for many years by hand, which has posed challenges for some. The new application allows DIS to focus more on the analysis of the case instead of the plotting logistics.

A closing thought for all of our nation's DIS: Although this recognition day takes place only once a year, we respect and support your invaluable hard work and dedication every single day. Your critical role in public health serves to protect health, stop the spread of infections, increasing access to and retention in medical care, educating the public about disease transmission and risk, and linking medical providers with health departments to prevent and control disease. This work could not be done without you. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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