

## Case Study #7

# Quality Leadership Process

---

---

---

### Learning Objectives

*At the conclusion of this case, students will be able to*

1. Select an appropriate leadership style when managing a communicable disease outbreak that involves several jurisdictions and sectors of the community
  2. Discuss the communication skills needed when facilitating a group of public health officials and private sector players who have different agendas
  3. Discuss the elements required for team building
- 
- 

**Y**ou are the supervising nurse epidemiologist for a city-county health department in a western state. The health department in which you work is responsible for public health services in a sprawling urban area of 2,500 square miles containing 1 million people. The state capitol and the state health department are located in your city.

On an unusually warm Tuesday morning in February, you get a call from the state epidemiologist, Dr. Jenkins. Dr. Jenkins says, "Bill, you won't believe what is happening! We have a problem." He is so distraught, you ask him to slow down. He tells you the following story:

"Late yesterday, I received a call from the coach of the Jefferson High School basketball team. On Saturday night, the team won the state semi-final basketball championship here in the city-county sports arena where high school basketball teams and their supporters from all over the state have been congregating since Friday night. On Monday morning, Coach Martin received several calls from his players and their parents. They were sick with fever, headache, stomach cramps, vomiting, and diarrhea. Coach Martin consulted with the team trainer, who advised him to call the state health department."

Your throat goes dry as you remember the phone message you received early this morning but had not yet returned because of your staff meeting. It was a message from the infection control nurse at City Hospital about an unusual number of visits to the emergency room over the weekend by people with the same symptoms.

**What is your immediate reaction to this story? What questions do you need to ask?**

Dr. Jenkins goes on to say that the illnesses have not been diagnosed, but he suspects a common source outbreak due to contaminated food or water consumed in the sports arena. You recognize that the potential for additional reports of illness is high. Thousands of people have consumed food and water in the arena over the past few days. Additional fears enter your thoughts. Teams are practicing in the arena all week. The state finals are scheduled to begin in the same arena this Friday night. Dr. Jenkins is so concerned about the potential involvement of the outbreak that he called in the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) before calling you.

As you put the telephone down, it rings again. It's a reporter from Channel 12—a major television station in the city. The reporter, who covers the City Hospital emergency room, wants to know what is going

on and what you are going to do about it. She wants to come to your office over the lunch hour to do a live report for the noon news.

**List the potential jurisdictions involved in this outbreak. List the segments of the private sector that have a stake in the outbreak. Analyze possible areas of conflict between jurisdictions and with the private sector when developing a public health response to this emergency.**

Your city-county health officer is on vacation and has left you in charge of the public health department during her absence. You have worked as a nurse epidemiologist in communicable disease control in this health department for the past 10 years. During other outbreaks, you have worked with officials from the Centers for Disease Control and the state health department. You also are well-known and respected by the media, local hospitals, and private health care providers. Your philosophy is that public health officials closest to the problem are best equipped to develop and manage an effective public health response, with support and technical assistance from federal and state agencies. You also believe that there is a role for the private sector when developing a public health response.

As a member of the community, you are sensitive to the needs of the media and concerns of the public. The media may pressure you to cancel all practice sessions in the arena this week. The business community, on the other hand, expects you to track down the source of the problem and resolve it before they lose business. Thousands of basketball fans will be visiting the city this weekend, staying in hotels, eating at restaurants, and shopping at malls. Private sector health care providers will look to you for answers as they field questions and concerns from their patients.

Sitting down at your desk, you begin to evaluate all of the information you have so far. In your jurisdiction, you are faced with an outbreak of a serious, yet-to-be-identified disease that seems to have a common source. A number of official agencies are involved. The federal agency, because of the potential of this outbreak, wants to send its own epidemiologists into your jurisdiction. The state health department also has its responsibilities in outbreak control from a statewide perspective. As the person in charge of the city-county health

department over the outbreak, you have to play a leadership role. Leadership is the means by which goals are accomplished. Immediate intervention is critical!

**What leadership characteristics can be applied in this situation?  
What values and principles can you promote?**

You realize that your office needs to provide leadership through clear and timely communication. Because you do not have all of the expertise or resources required to intervene in this outbreak, you will rely on help from other jurisdictions. Your connections with the other jurisdictions and the community will add to your effectiveness. You decide that the intervention will be a team effort.

**Who needs to be involved in the decision making? How can decisions be made?**

An epidemiologist from CDC arrives on Wednesday morning. You have assembled a group of people: an epidemiologist from the state health department, the CDC epidemiologist, the infection control nurse from the hospital, the director of the City Environmental Health Department, and the manager of the sports arena.

CDC wants to send a contingent of epidemiologists to the scene to take specimens and do interviews. They envision a major scientific article here. You want to set up a hotline for the public to call in so that you can gather more information and determine the cause of this outbreak. The Environmental Health Department wants to start taking water and food samples from the concession stands in the arena. They also want all public health nurses assigned to do food histories on people with symptoms. The sports arena manager does not want the media involved. The state epidemiologist just listens.

**What techniques can you use for handling differing agendas from different jurisdictions? How will you build this team in order to execute an appropriate public health response in a timely way?**

As the facilitator of this assembly of people, you have prepared a meeting agenda and assigned the roles of note taker and timekeeper. The group needs to stay on target, and a recording of the proceedings and decisions needs to be kept. You ask the group what else needs to be put on the agenda. The group develops ground rules for its proceedings. The ground rules are the following:

- Speak one at a time
- Participate in the discussion
- Respect everyone's opinion
- Seek to understand
- Listen

The next step in developing this team is to agree on its goals. Using a consensus-building exercise, the group agrees that the primary goal is to determine and eliminate the source of the outbreak as quickly as possible. Your job is to keep the goal in front of the team, clarify the path to the goal, and minimize obstructions. The principles the group has agreed on are the following:

- Value all opinions
- Acknowledge concerns
- Disseminate clear and timely messages to the public

With adoptions of the agenda, ground rules, goals, and principles, the group is ready to design a step-by-step intervention.

