

Topics: Recent topics in public health in Japan 2022

< Practice Report >

Overview of the Training Course for the Development of Public Health Center Directors implemented by the National Institute of Public Health

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Abstract

The training course for public health center directors is one of the National Institute of Public Health (NIPH) training courses. This course is designed to help local government officials who do not meet the qualifications for public health center directors as stipulated in the Enforcement Order of the Community Health Law to meet the requirements for appointment. Over the past 20 years, a total of 360 people has taken the course. This training course has been conducted face-to-face, but it is now being conducted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This report aims to review the history of this training course and outline its prospects.

keywords: public health center directors, professional training, local government, human resource development, online training, COVID-19 pandemic

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I. Introduction

The National Institute of Public Health (NIPH) is one of the research institutes affiliated with the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare. Its mission is to perform the education and training of technical officers who work in the fields of public health, environmental health, and social welfare in the local government. The Institute of Public Health, the predecessor of NIPH, was established on March 29, 1938. Subsequently, the Institute of Public Health was merged with other research institutes on April 1, 2002, to be newly established as the NIPH [1].

The objectives of education and training are to provide professional education to personnel in the central and local governments (including *Hokenjo*, a public health center) are engaged in public health-related activities to improve public health in Japan [2]. NIPH offers many training courses, of which the training course for the development of public health center directors is one of the most representative.

The global COVID-19 pandemic and various natural disasters have taken a serious toll on the health of citizens.

In this context, Public health centers play a critical role as a base not only for health crisis management in the community but also for health policy during normal times. Therefore, public health center directors need a lot of knowledge and competency, which requires professional education. Thus, the NIPH offers a training course for the development of public health center directors, which is outlined in this report.

II. The Legal Basis for the Public Health Center Directors' Training Course

Public health centers are public institutions that support the health and hygiene of residents and are established by prefectures, ordinance-designated cities, core cities, other designated cities (public health center ordinance-designated cities), and special wards (Tokyo's 23 wards) based on the Community Health Law.

Recently, some of these offices have been integrated with municipal health centers and welfare offices and are called "Welfare and Public Health Center," "Health and Welfare

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Center,” or “Health and Welfare Center.” However, as public health centers are required to be established under the Local Health Law, they are named “public health centers” in the organizational regulations of the local government. In the case of ordinance-designated cities, core cities, and ordinance-designated cities with only one public health center, the department in charge of health and sanitation in the main government office is called the “public health center.” In Japan, the number of public health centers has decreased by almost half from 848 in 1989 to 469 in 2020. Public health centers have been on the front line, day and night, dealing with positive cases of the COVID-19 infection and coordinating hospitalization with medical institutions, and from the perspective of strengthening the crisis management system, strengthening the functions of the public health center is currently under discussion.

According to Article 4, Paragraph 1, of the Enforcement Decree of the Community Health Act [3], public health center directors must be medical doctor who meet any of the following categories:

- (1) A person who has been engaged in public health practice for at least three years.
- (2) A person who has undergone a training course conducted by the NIPH as stipulated in Article 135 of the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare Organization Ordinance (Government Ordinance No. 252 of 2000).
- (3) A person who is recognized by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare as having skills or experience equivalent or superior to those listed in item 2.

The notice of the Director-General of the Health Bureau states that public health center directors are “those who have completed a course equivalent to the training course in a foreign country and obtained a master’s degree in public health (MPH; MSPH).” This does not apply to domestic graduate schools of public health.

Therefore, a medical doctor with less than three years of public health experience must complete the NIPH’s public health center director course described in (2) above to be appointed as public health center directors. It should also be noted that this does not preclude those with more than three years of public health experience from taking the course.

Additionally, Article 4, Paragraph 2, of the Enforcement Order of the Community Health Law states that if the heads of local governments find it extremely difficult to appoint a physician as a public health center director, a staff member who is not licensed medical doctor and “meets all of the following requirements” may be appointed as a public health center director for a period of up to two years:

- (i) A person who has been recognized by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare as having knowledge equiv-

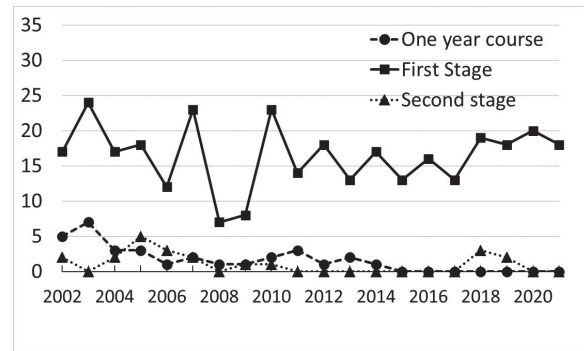


Figure 1 Trends in the number of participants who completed the training course for the development of public health center directors (2002–2021)

alent or superior to that of a physician regarding specialized medical knowledge necessary for public health administration.

- (ii) A person who has been engaged in public health practice for five years or more.
- (iii) A person who has undergone a training course conducted by the NIPH.

If there are unavoidable reasons, the period may be extended only once, but not for more than two years.

Since it is difficult for some local governments to secure administrative physicians, this rule may be applied to allow dentists and pharmacists to take the course. Figure 1 shows the number of participants in the public health center director course over the past 20 years.

III. Content of the Training provided in the Public Health Center Director Course

There are currently two types of public health center director courses: main course and split course. After completing the three-month course in the latter, students can proceed to the second stage of the course if they wish, and they can continue their studies while working at the public health center for the next three years.

The first three months of the main course are the same as the first stage of the split course, and thus the main course is equivalent to the first stage of the split course plus the second stage of the split course. The training program is divided into the first and second stages as shown in the following.

1. First stage (*Bunkatsu-Zenki*)

The first stage is a 13-week course, usually starting from early April to early July. During this course, trainees systematically learn the subjects listed in Table 1. Some of these courses are designed to allow trainees to learn the basics of public health so that even doctors who have been

Table 1 List of subjects in the First stage and the 1-year course

| Subject | Number of Lectures (1unit=90min) |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Basic theory of Public Health | 22 |
| Public Health Administration | 24 |
| Biostatistics | 16 |
| Epidemiology | 12 |
| Health Crisis Management | 14 |
| Infectious Disease | 14 |
| Public health Practice | 16 |
| Environmental Health and Sanitation | 20 |
| Social Security and Welfare | 14 |
| Organization Management | 18 |
| Behavioral Science | 6 |
| Practice in Social Research | 16 |
| Practice in Community Diagnosis | 12 |
| Special Lectures and Field Trips | 8 |
| Guidance, Homeroom, etc. | 20 |
| Total | 232 |

practicing as clinical doctors in hospitals before attending the first stage can learn smoothly. Additionally, some courses consist mainly of exercises and classroom lectures, and many courses incorporate active learning centered on group work, aiming for independent learning by the trainees. Through the training, trainees can learn practical contents related to public health that are necessary for public health center directors and develop the ability to cope with practical work as public health center directors or leaders after completing the training. Another important point is that an average of 20 trainees from the same year study together in the same classroom, which creates a sense of solidarity among the trainees and allows them to continue interacting with each other even after completing the training.

2. One-Year Course or second stage (*Bunkatsu-Kouki*)

The main course or the second stage of the split course aims to further deepen the knowledge learned in the first stage of the split course. In the second stage of the program, trainees are expected to complete the first stage of the program while working as regular employees in their respective municipalities, participate in short-term training programs offered by NIPH, and take online courses to earn the necessary credits. As of December 2021, 11 trainees were enrolled in the second stage of the division, and they were mentored online regularly.

IV. Current status of Public Health Center Director Course operation since COVID-19 pandemic (Since 2020)

In Japan, the first case of COVID-19 was reported on January 16, 2020. On April 7, 2020, the government declared a state of emergency in seven prefectures, including Tokyo, due to the continued spread of the virus. The first stage of the 2020 split course was scheduled to begin on April 8 with 20 trainees at the National Institute of Public Health. However, under the declared state of emergency, it became difficult to gather trainees from all over the country to conduct the training. Thus, the policy was hastily changed, and it was decided to conduct the training online using the Zoom system. At that time, public health centers across the country were extremely busy with the work related to the COVID-19, but since the convergence of the coronas was unknown, it was decided to conduct this course to provide sufficient training and opportunities to those who could become public health center directors. The mission of the NIPH is to provide sufficient training opportunities to those who can become public health center directors through this course.

Although the NIPH has been conducting distance training over a long period of time, this was the first time that the training was delivered on time and the students could access it from their workplaces or homes in a simultaneous interactive manner. On May 25, the state of emergency was lifted, but the course was completed in an unusual format due to restrictions on the movement of people, with the entire program conducted online only until the completion ceremony on July 10.

Furthermore, the Zoom online training format was also adopted in the short-term training courses held by the NIPH after July 2020, and online training is still being conducted in many training courses.

This training course held in 2020 was highly evaluated by the trainees, although it was conducted entirely online, as described in the following. However, there were many comments that it was disappointing that there was no opportunity to meet each other in person. Therefore, the first half of the training in 2021 was planned to be conducted in a “mixed” format, with the first two weeks and the last week in a group format and ~10 weeks in between in an online format. Since the second declaration of emergency due to the spread of COVID-19 was lifted on March 21, 2021, all trainees who were scheduled to attend the course were able to gather at the start of the course. Immediately after the two-week assembly period, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government issued the third emergency declaration (April 25–June 20). However, there was no problem in the operation of the training, and the participants were able to reassemble for the assembly period starting on July 5, and the closing ceremony was successfully held.

As described above, the training in the past three years

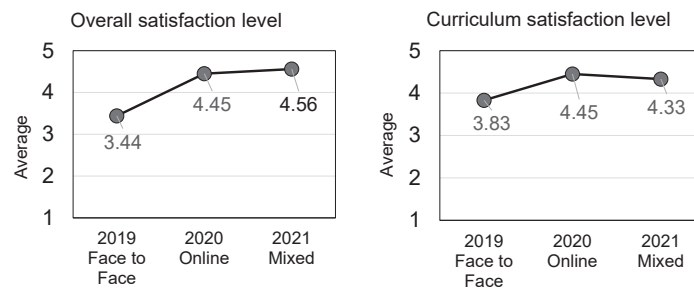


Figure 2 Overall satisfaction and the curriculum satisfaction level by trainees last three years

The values represent the average score of all trainees (5 point scale)

has been held in different formats: group, online, and mixed. We would like to introduce the evaluation of the training by the trainees.

We asked 2019, 2020, and 2021 trainees to rate their overall satisfaction with the training on a 5-point scale (5 (very satisfied) to 1 (very dissatisfied)). Figure 2 shows that the average rating was higher in 2020 and 2021 than in 2019, in a group format. We also asked the trainees to rate the training curriculum on a 5-point scale (5 (very good) to 1 (very bad)), and the rating was also higher in 2020 and 2021 than in 2019. Since the backgrounds and experiences of the trainees in each year are different, it is difficult to draw general conclusions, but it is thought that the introduction of online training at least has the same or even better educational effect as group training.

In the past, trainees were dispatched from their home institutions to spend long periods, as long as three months, in the dormitories of the NIPH. In some cases, trainees have health problem due to the difficulty in adopting to an unfamiliar environment. In other cases, trainees need to return their home on weekends, which sometimes interfered with their training. However, in last two years, we heard many positive comments about the online training, such as “it became easier for trainees with childcare and nursing care during courses” and “I was able to spend more meaningful time with my family.” The trainees in 2021 also commented that they were able to proceed with the online training because they were able to do it face-to-face first.

V. Conclusion

The NIPH aims to improve the quality of public health centers across the country by providing the training necessary to qualify for appointment as public health center directors and will continue to make efforts to provide better training content. Regarding training methods, it is necessary to improve training effectiveness and provide an environment that is easy to participate in from the standpoint of trainees, and mixed training is one solution at this point.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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<報告>

国立保健医療科学院で実施している保健所長等の養成訓練の概要

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抄録

国立保健医療科学院で実施している研修の代表的なものの一つに専門課程Ⅰ 地域保健福祉行政管理分野がある。このコースは、公衆衛生、保健福祉医療分野におけるリーダーとなるために必要な高度の能力を養うことを目的とするものであり、あわせて、保健所長の資格要件を定めた地域保健法施行令第4条第1項第2号の「国立保健医療科学院の行う養成訓練の課程」及び第2項第3号の「養成訓練課程」に相当し、本課程を修了した医師または医師以外の地方公共団体職員は、保健所長となる要件を満たすものである。すなわち、保健所長への就任を予定しているが、行政医師としての経験が浅いものや、修了後直ちに保健所長にならない場合でも将来的に所長なる予定がある方を対象としている。

本課程の履修については、現在2通りのコースが設置されている。一つは「本科」と呼ばれる修業期間が1年のコースであり、もう一つは「分割前期」という約3ヶ月間(13週間)のコースである。3ヶ月間のコースを修了後、希望により「分割後期」に進むことが可能であり、その後の3年間を保健所で勤務をしながら学びを続けるものである。本科のうち最初の3ヶ月は分割前期と同じプログラムであり、「本科」と「分割前期+分割後期」の履修は同等である。

本科と分割前期は通常4月上旬に開講し、7月上旬に閉講する約13週間のコースである。分割前期を受講するまで病院で臨床医師として診療をしていた医師であっても、スムーズに学習ができるように公衆衛生の基礎的事項から学ぶことが可能な科目も配置している。また科目によっては、座学だけでなく、演習が主体となる科目もある。多くの科目で、グループワークを中心とするアクティブラーニングを取り入れており、研修生の主体的な学びを目指している。これらの研修を通じて、保健所長として必要となる公衆衛生に関連する実践的な内容を学び、修了後に保健所長あるいはリーダーとしての実務に対応できる能力を養うことができる。本科および分割後期では、これらの講義や演習に加え、「特別研究」として地域の公衆衛生的問題に研究的アプローチで解決に取り組むことも行っている。

これまでではすべての研修を対面式で行ってきたが、新型コロナウイルス蔓延に伴う状況により研修を対面で行うことが困難となり、令和2年度は全面的にオンラインで、また令和3年度は集合とオンラインの混合により行った。このように過去3年間の開催形態が、集合形式、オンライン形式、混合形式と異なるものとなったが、オンライン研修を組み込むことの利点も多く見られ、今後の研修の運営にとって大きな変革点となっている。本課程の修了生が全国各地の保健所で公衆衛生のリーダーとして活躍できるよう、研修内容についても引き続き洗練をしていく必要がある。

キーワード：保健所長、専門教育、自治体、人材育成、オンライン研修、新型コロナウイルス感染症まん延