

The Front-lines of Public Health.

The anthrax bioterrorist attacks this past fall clearly demonstrated that any laboratory in the state could be called upon to provide Public Health related services to citizens and health care providers. From our perspective, the private or clinical laboratories are truly on the front lines of public health and one of our responsibilities is to provide current information about emergencies such as those related to bioterrorism and emerging infectious diseases. The NPHL received questions, phone calls and in many cases, specimens from all areas of the state. We were especially fortunate in Nebraska to have received support from the CDC and Association of Public Health Laboratories to participate in an outreach program called the National Laboratory System. As a result, Mr. Tony Sambol was available to visit laboratories throughout the state following the bioterrorist incidents and deliver protocols or answer questions that various technologists had about safety and isolation procedures. Tony developed a CD-ROM containing protocols and other information that was so successful it was adopted by the CDC and eventually delivered to over 4,500 laboratories throughout the United States after 9/11..

We are now in the process of organizing a state-wide network to facilitate communication and assess laboratory capability in all regions of the state. Such a network will be important for handling new challenges in the future as well as for our daily efforts at improving public health. The ability to utilize state of the art information technology is one of the key components of a health monitoring program and we will work to provide information using the web, but we also recognize that many technologists do not have access to the internet at the workbench and therefore alternative approaches are also necessary. In recognition of the continuing need for information, this edition of our newsletter summarizes key topics ranging from a new strain of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus* to West Nile virus to irradiation of the US mail. We invite your comments and would be pleased to find an answer to any questions that might arise. *Steven Hinrichs, M.D., Director NPHL*