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Australasian Faculty of
Public Health Medicine

Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine (AFPHM)

Oral Examination

2017 Sample Questions

Question 1: Land contamination

You are a public health physician working in the Environmental Health branch of your State Department of Health.

The branch has received the report of a recent toxicological assessment by the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) of the site of a disused manufacturing plant that is now used as a community park. The assessment shows high levels of trichloroethylene (TCE) and other chlorinated solvents in soil and ground water samples. There is a creek flowing through the site and there is medium density housing adjacent to the site boundary.

You have been asked to lead the assessment and management of this matter.

Outline your approach.

Notes:

This question provides some information regarding an environmental contamination scenario. You need to consider the information you have been given and key facts that you need to ascertain. The essence is the requirement for an environmental and human health risk assessment - and a management plan. What are the potential consequences if this is unresolved. Consider what is appropriate for a PHP to know – and what information needs to be sourced from specific others (eg toxicological info). Make sure you are clear on your accountabilities and what you have been asked to do!

Question 2: Cervical cancer

You are a public health physician working in a State Department of Health. In 2017, HPV testing will be introduced to the National Cervical Screening Program to replace conventional cytology (Pap smear testing), which has been used in the program since 1991. HPV testing will then be recommended every 5 years for women aged 25–74 years. HPV testing has a higher sensitivity (95–97%) but a lower specificity (90–93%) for high-grade cervical intraepithelial neoplasia (CIN) than Pap smears and is expected to reduce incidence and mortality of cervical cancer by a further 20–30%.

You have been invited to speak to a meeting of General Practitioners.

Explain the rationale for these changes to the National Cervical Screening Program.

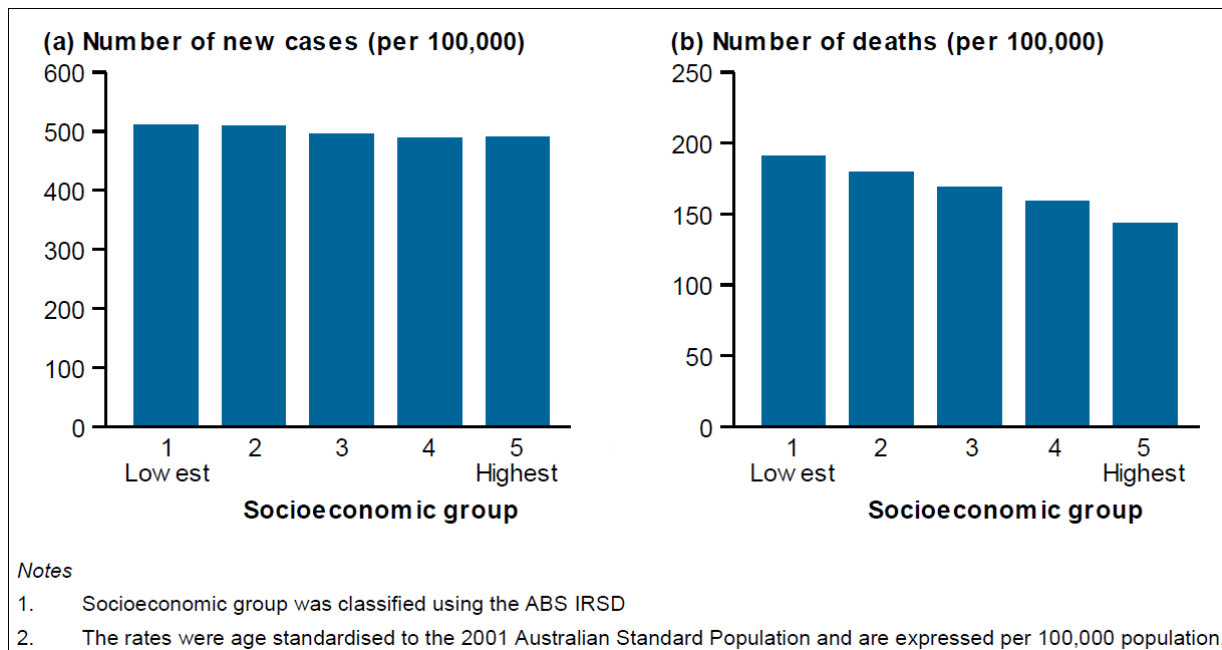
Notes:

You have been given some technical information re Pap Smear and HPV testing which you need to be able to explain in the context of a rationale for change. You are also expected to demonstrate your knowledge of the National Cx Screening Program and key evidence behind it. What are the practical issues / implications for Australian women.

Question 3: Cancer Mortality

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has recently documented the incidence and mortality of cancer in Australia according to socioeconomic status, as measured by quintile of the Index of Relative Socioeconomic Disadvantage (IRSD). This is summarised in the graphs below.

- (a) Age-standardised incidence of all cancers combined, 2008–2012, by IRSD quintile
- (b) Age-standardised mortality for all cancers combined, 2010–2014, by IRSD quintile



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2017, *Cancer in Australia*

1. Describe the information summarised in the graphs above. (20%)
2. Outline the factors that contribute to the outcomes in (a) and the outcomes in (b). (80%)

Notes:

This is a typical question where you are asked to describe some data and then to provide some insights into what the data show. Describe and/or define/clarify the meaning of all the information that is presented to you. Be clear on use of the terms standardisation and IRSD quintiles etc. In the second part of the question you need to demonstrate your understanding of all cancer incidence and death rates and their relationship to SES and why. It is a good idea to give some examples to help in your explanations.

Question 4: Medically supervised injecting centres

You are a public health physician in a State Department of Health.

There has been a recent cluster of heroin overdose deaths in your state's capital city, attracting considerable media attention. A variety of non-government organisations and harm minimisation advocacy groups have called for a medically supervised injecting centre (MSIC) to be established, and this call has received sympathetic media coverage.

The Chief Health Officer has asked you to develop a policy proposal for the establishment of an MSIC in your state.

How would you approach this task?

Notes:

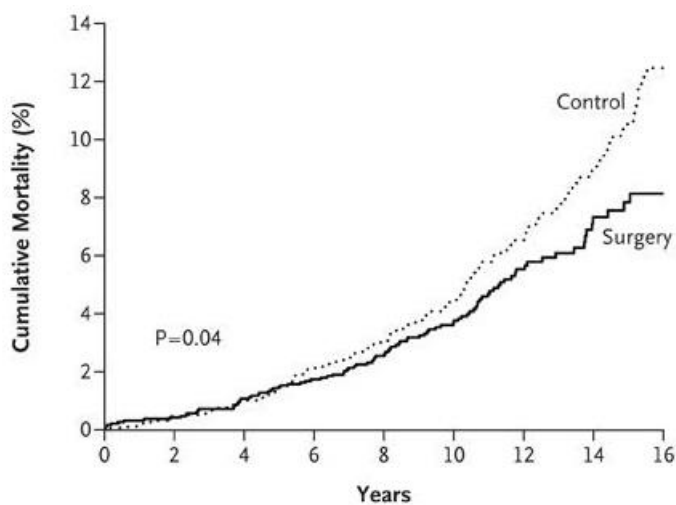
You are working in government and being asked to describe your approach to the development of a policy proposal. So be clear on the full context and who is behind it. Make no assumptions here. You should show your knowledge of MSICs in Australia and the relevant evidence base. Be as practical as you can be in your response – and be as specific as you can in discussing involvement of stakeholders, and using evidence based arguments to formulate and progress a policy proposal.

Question 5: Bariatric surgery

You are a public health physician working in your jurisdiction's Department of Health.

The results of a 16-year follow-up of participants in an obesity surgery study have been released. At baseline 2,010 obese participants elected to have bariatric surgery and 2,037 received conventional treatment. The groups were matched on 18 variables. There were 101 deaths in the surgery group and 129 deaths in the non-surgery group. The hazard ratio for death comparing bariatric surgery to no surgery, was 0.76 (95% confidence interval, 0.59–0.99; $p = 0.04$).

Figure 1. Unadjusted cumulative mortality over 16 years among surgically treated subjects and their obese controls.



Source: Sjostrom, L. *Int J Obesity* 2008;32:S93–97

Your Health Minister has requested an interpretation of the study and comments on the findings.

1. Based on the information above, including the graph, explain what the results show. (20%)
2. What aspects of the study design and analysis do you need to consider in your interpretation of the findings? (60%)
3. What other information do you require to determine for your Minister whether bariatric surgery should be funded for public patients? (20%)

Notes:

Ensure you answer each of the three questions! Similarly to question 4 you need to be clear and succinct in describing what the results, including those in the figure, show. A standard approach to the critique of study design will be helpful, focusing on considerations of internal and external validity. Try to be practical in your consideration

of information required in the 3rd part – ie things any Minister would want to know before committing to the funding of a new procedure.

Question 6: Suicide Prevention

You are a public health physician in a State Department of Health.

There has been an increase in youth suicides in a remote Aboriginal community in your jurisdiction. During the period of community grieving, the Premier has stated in the media that if any further suicides occur he will 'close the community' withdrawing all funding for essential services, health and education. There is strong media interest in this issue.

The Department has been approached by the Primary Health Network and a non-government organisation (NGO) with expertise in mental health who want to co-commission a suicide prevention program in the affected community.

- 1. Explain your approach to developing this suicide prevention program, sensitive to the cultural safety and context of suicide in such communities. (80%)**
- 2. Briefly outline how you would manage the media interest in this issue. (20%)**

Notes:

This question provides you with an opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge of important unique issues facing Aboriginal communities esp. re suicide. You will ideally use an established health promotion framework to inform your response to the development of a suicide prevention program. Think carefully about the target community and its attributes and be as practical as you can in illustrating the components of your preferred framework (avoid "spouting out" a framework out of context). In relation to managing media interest, be clear in your mind what outcomes you want to achieve, and use standard approaches before responding to the media. Consider potential benefits and harms that could be generated and remember you are accountable to government.

Question 7: Measles

You are the public health physician in a regional Public Health Unit.

You have just received a phone call during business hours from an experienced General Practitioner. She has made a clinical diagnosis of measles in a 3-year-old child who has recently returned with family from Bali. The GP is concerned as the child attends a local child care centre. The child and the child's parents are still with the GP in the consultation room.

- 1. Outline what you would discuss with the GP. (50%)**
- 2. Describe the next steps you would take in responding to this situation. (50%)**

Notes:

You need to demonstrate your knowledge of measles as a public health issue – including clinical attributes and why it is such an important vaccine preventable disease. You are expected to describe a standard approach to investigating and managing a measles outbreak including contact tracing and management. Your response should be a well organised, practical response to the situation as it would be in day to day practice.