

Why we established jHASE, the Journal of HIV/AIDS Surveillance & Epidemiology

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Abstract/Introduction

We expect much from surveillance and epidemiologic data for the practice of public health and the advancement of health sciences, including the use of such data to track the leading edge of epidemics, inform the public and scientific community, advocate and guide resource allocation for populations most severely affected, develop and target effective interventions, monitor and evaluate the impact of programs, and guide the future research agenda. In recent years, there has been expansion in the methods and scope of surveillance and epidemiology of HIV/AIDS and related sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), tuberculosis (TB) and viral hepatitis (and relevant social and behavioral approaches) including integrated applications for the prevention and control of these related epidemics. Moreover, public health agencies are increasingly engaging in applied epidemiology research and public health practice in partnership with academia and community-based organizations. Given these multiple functions, the pace of evolution in the field and the increasing number of partners involved, we have long felt that a journal devoted to public health surveillance and population-level epidemiologic studies of HIV/AIDS and related STDs, TB and viral hepatitis was missing in the scientific literature.

Population-based surveillance and related epidemiologic studies are poised to make the most immediate impact on public health decisions. There are now multiple, innovative public health surveillance techniques to track incidence and prevalence of HIV/AIDS and related epidemics in general and high-risk populations. Public Health agencies are, by necessity, called upon to increase the quantity and quality of supplemental epidemiologic research, analyses and interpretation of findings used as a basis for evidence-based prevention and care program planning. In addition, as global and national population-level HIV and related disease interventions require increasingly larger amounts of resources, the need to implement carefully targeted evidence-based public health interventions with adequate monitoring, evaluation and peer-reviewed quality assurance has never been greater. Public health practitioners worldwide therefore need ready access to population-based HIV/AIDS (and related disease) surveillance and epidemiologic data as well as the cutting edge methods of the field.

Our proposition is that this scope of work has not been adequately and incisively covered by scientific journals in general nor by those focused on biomedical and clinical aspects of HIV/AIDS and related STDs, TB and viral hepatitis in particular. The need to establish a body of exemplary reference literature which has undergone quality assurance through rigorous peer review, disseminate such findings and provide continuing education through open access media is particularly acute in parts of the world most adversely affected by HIV and related conditions.

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Aims and Scope of the Journal: jHASE (pronounced: 'jheyz') conducts peer review of both external contributions and internal proceedings of the Institute of HIV/AIDS Surveillance and Epidemiology – iHASE (pronounced: 'ahy-heyz'), and publishes articles on applied epidemiology. This includes public health surveillance and epidemiologic research on HIV/AIDS and related STDs, TB, viral hepatitis, and social and behavioral factors. Through peer-review, jHASE aims to provide a quality assurance service that complements applied epidemiology consultation, continuing education, and in-service training initiatives of iHASE and other similar programs. jHASE also aims to stimulate a culture of scientific rigor and open access dissemination of relevant findings from applied epidemiology research that is increasingly conducted by public health agencies in collaboration with community-based and academic partners.

Background, Rationale and Significance:

The conceptualization of jHASE arose from recognition of the need for quality assurance, training, continuing education through peer review in the burgeoning global field of public health surveillance and applied epidemiology research in HIV/AIDS and associated diseases and socio-behavioral factors. Further, population-level findings of public health surveillance and related epidemiologic research on HIV/AIDS and related STDs, TB and viral hepatitis are not often published in peer-reviewed scientific journals with particular expertise or interest in the field. Hence, public health agencies have difficulty obtaining quality assurance and continuing education through peer-review of their work. Similarly, public health agencies have difficulty accessing authoritative evidence-based, population-level research findings needed for prevention and care planning and outcomes-driven program development and implementation. The jHASE initiative is unique as there are no other open access peer-reviewed journals that focus on the field of public health surveillance and epidemiologic research of HIV/AIDS and related STDs, TB, viral hepatitis and other relevant aspects.

About the Field of Applied HIV/AIDS and Related Disease Epidemiology:

The scope of the envisioned field includes public health surveillance and population-level epidemiologic research on HIV/AIDS and related STDs, TB, viral hepatitis, and relevant social and behavioral factors. Public health surveillance of these conditions is conceptualized as the ongoing systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of outcome-specific data for use in planning, implementation, and evaluation of public health practice. HIV epidemiology is the study of the distribution and determinants of the infection and the disease (including risk factors and interventions) in human populations. By stimulating collaboration between public health epidemiologists and practitioners, academia and community-based partners, iHASE aims to increase the quantity and quality of highly relevant applied epidemiologic research which addresses specific major population-scale problems which are uniquely addressed by public health agencies. Through jHASE peer review, quality assurance is conducted to develop a body of literature on authoritative findings from applied HIV/AIDS epidemiology research. The body of authoritative findings developed will serve as the scientific basis for guiding public health intervention (prevention and care) program planning, resource distribution, and evidence-based outcomes-driven program development and implementation.

Conclusions: We anticipate that the establishment of jHASE will help advance the field of applied HIV/AIDS and related disease epidemiology by providing quality assurance and continuing education through peer review, and open access.