**General Job Title**

Informatics Program Manager

*Linda Mackinnon Cohen is the informatics program manager for the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and is based out of Massachusetts. Informatics programming is the discipline of sharing and integrating electronic data.*

**Job Description**

As the manager, the candidate is required to export subject matter on a national and global level. The main roles include:

1. Distinguishing the specific terminology that is required by the CDC and interpreting it
2. Corresponding with numerous consults that the candidate manages
3. Connecting and networking people
4. Determining sufficient resource management and standards for projects
5. Using data collected in the field in the network of labs

*Cohen travels frequently to national and global sites to compare data, specifically antimicrobial resistance, and to meet with leaders to discuss new data and implementations. On an average day, she takes about 4-10 phone calls communicating with the 15 consultants she manages, offering support and discussing road blocks. In addition, she writes papers, conference abstracts, and documents new projects. Cohen also spends time in the field consulting for organizations that can then use the data for their research.*

**Partners and Contacts**

The candidate must work with national and global organizations as well as citizens.

*The contacts and partners that Cohen works with include the World Health Organization (WHO), the CDC based out of other countries, and the ministry of health. She also works with citizens and epidemiologists, keeping up on new implementations of disease and computer programming.*

**Skills Required**

To perform this role, the candidate needs both “hard and soft skills”. In this field it is important to build relationships to gain trust and to utilize at a later date and to understand informatics in a laboratory setting.

*Cohen’s background is in international public health with a focus on occupational and environmental health. She also is a certified project manager, which is a program with an international body of program managers. The experience required is a combination of epidemiology, laboratory skill, and information technology. The primary skills Cohen uses, besides interpersonal skills, is laboratory information system knowledge which includes statistical tests and algorithms that can create programs to detect novel events.*

**Work Environment**

The candidate must function well in a highly mobile environment with many face-to-face interactions.

*According to Cohen, the most successful people in the job are the ones that are “a little bit crazy”—meaning having a flexible and optimistic personality. The main goal in success is to move towards a faster and better product so this means a fast paced, often foreign environment where it is important to adapt quickly.*

**Communication**

The candidate must effectively be able to communicate with a range of people, including those in countries with culture different to the United States, those in environmental and health organizations, doctors, computer programmers, and lab technicians. The candidate must be able to work in team with others and have leadership skills within that team. In order to properly communicate the data, the candidate must be able to understand and interpret the terminology specific to the CDC and professionals in the specified health field.

The specific means of communication the candidate must be able to use are email, phone calls, face-to-face meetings, conference abstracts, and data sheets and papers.

*Cohen emphasized the importance of group work. One thing she does to exemplify this is go out into the field with her team and a stake holder, and when they run into challenges, they document it and the solution. Once returning to home base, the team will sit together as a group and discuss the team’s strengths and weakness, what worked well, and what was prepared efficiently and then comprise it into a standardized template. They all input together and walk through the process as a group in order to move forward next time. They also invite other groups and organizations to listen to the meeting to consider their input. According to Cohen, “It is important to take the time to communicate together. It is an evolution of processes and teamwork through documentation of expectations and concerns.”*

*Another form of communication Cohen utilizes is in the form of preparation. It is important to effectively communicate what is expected so that all members of the team are prepared. For example, Cohen reflected on an instance when it was expected that all members had a high functioning laptop and assumed that all did, however a member of the team did not have a laptop and it negatively effected the group. As a remedy to the solution, the team now has created a manual that outlines what is expected for new team members and has been integrated into the orientation.*

*The last important communication skill that Cohen emphasized was the importance of appealing to a global audience. She explained that the best way is to simplify down to what is absolutely necessary with a clean presentation that lacks jargon; the goal is to get the message across effectively. She also stressed that the best way to communicate is to also be a good listener and allow them to respond while also making sure you are being heard correctly. Being culturally sensitive and having a simple message appeals the best to foreign contacts. Cohen recalls meeting in the Ukraine where it appeared that the contacts were yelling but it was just their way of communicating their ideas. Cohen’s last piece of advice was to take a shot of whatever drink they offer you and go with the flow.*

**Reflection**

Before this interview I didn’t realize how much of the job required technological knowledge in laboratories. It was helpful to learn that there are programs that can certify one in the labs and program managing. I enjoyed hearing about how flexible and versatile the job is. It seems to be exciting and covering many areas of interest—environmental and human health, global connections, field work, and lab research. The global aspect really appealed to me and the “being up for anything” mentality.