
Tabletop Exercise: Communication and Coordination

Exercise Modules

Training Goal

The tabletop exercises uses simulation-based activities to train students to identify and communicate with individuals within and outside the laboratory and institution to analyze potential risks and associated risk mitigation approaches. The exercise encourages students to consider with whom and how to work with individuals within their institutions to implement risk reduction measures.

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Tabletop Exercise Modules

Note: This exercise involves a hypothetical scenario. All names, characters, and incidents portrayed in this exercise are fictitious. Although the scenario is designed to be plausible, no identification with real persons, places, buildings, or situations is intended or should be inferred.

Scenario Characters:

- Dr. Micro: Microbiologist who oversees a research laboratory
- Mr. Senres: Senior researcher in the lab of Dr. Micro
- Ms. Tech: Laboratory technician in the lab of Dr. Micro
- Grad: Graduate student in the lab of Dr. Micro

Module 1

A hospital in a remote city in a MENA country reported a few cases of respiratory illness. After initial testing in their facilities, they sent clinical samples to a microbiologist (Dr. Micro) who runs a research laboratory. The laboratory often assists diagnostic laboratories with detection and characterization of emerging infectious diseases. Dr. Micro asked a senior researcher (Mr. Senres) in her lab to conduct pathogen characterization studies to identify the causative agent and strain. Mr. Senres asked a technician (Ms. Tech) and graduate student (Grad) to assist him. Ms. Tech used this study to teach Grad proper handling and storage of clinically-relevant samples. The team closely worked together to conduct molecular and microbiological tests and analyze the results. The results of the initial tests were found to be inconclusive, which prompts Ms. Tech to re-run the tests. When she goes to collect the stored clinical samples, she finds one vial missing and another in a different location than indicated in the laboratory's inventory log.

Ms. Tech speaks to Mr. Senres about the missing vial. Mr. Senres is not aware of the missing vial and becomes concerned himself. Together, they go to speak to Grad, but Grad is not available because he left a few days before. Mr. Senres and Ms. Tech speak to Dr. Micro, who disregards their concerns, suggests that an accounting error is the cause of the missing and misplaced vials, and sends the researchers back to the laboratory.

Module 2

One week later, Grad returns to the laboratory and starts conducting experiments. Mr. Senres approaches Grad and asks about the missing and misplaced vials. At that time, Grad informs Mr. Senres that he took the virus to examine it further and apologizes for accidentally replacing some of the vials in the wrong location. Grad continues to describe his experiments, which include an examination of cytopathic effects in tissue culture cells, viral concentration, and infectious dose in tissue culture cells. As he describes the experiments, Grad makes Mr. Senres think he was asked to conduct these studies by Dr. Micro. After the discussion, Mr. Senres thinks he misjudged the situation and tells Grad that he needs to be kept informed about the research and results from his characterization studies. During the next few weeks, Grad begins working unusual hours and by himself in the laboratory, and misses research update meetings with Mr. Senres regularly. Grad cites the experiments as a primary reason for his unusual work hours and lack of communication.