Public Health Practice

Stories from the Field
The University of Texas School of Public Health
Student Practicum Experiences
Fall 2013 – Health Promotion & Behavioral Sciences
The practicum experience is an integral part of the MPH and DrPH curricula. Public health students are provided with the opportunity to apply their classroom knowledge to real world settings through which they make a meaningful contribution to a public health organization.

Under the guidance of a community preceptor and faculty sponsor, students from all divisions gain a deeper understanding of public health practice, interact with professionals in the field, and expand their repertoire of professional skills.

This twelfth-edition e-magazine showcases student practicum experiences throughout the Fall 2013 semester. (Prior semesters may be accessed through the e-book, a collection of student abstracts and e-magazines describing their experiences.)
## Practicum Topics

Serving Size: 1 Practicum per Student  
Servings per e-Magazine: 12

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### Health Promotion & Behavioral Sciences

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Community Health Needs Assessment

Let’s Get Healthy Houston

Needs assessment focused on health for communities in the City of Houston located in service delivery areas

I worked with the City of Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) on their initiative to create comprehensive community health profiles that provide a baseline reference of health conditions and health-related problems in Houston communities. Some of the areas of analysis focused on socioeconomic, cultural, environmental, and health conditions, quality of life indicators, and health behaviors that contribute to poor health.

The final products created are health profiles for the HHS health service areas. These indicators identified will serve to help planning, designing evidence-based interventions, and implementing and evaluating public health programs to help improve health outcomes and decrease health disparities in communities of need.

Public Health Significance

HHS works within all sectors of providing the Public Health Essential Services of Public Health. In particular, the Public Health Essential Services that are most related to my practicum experience was monitoring the current health status of communities within the designated health services areas, informing and educating stakeholders, partners and communities about health issues affecting residents in the City of Houston. The project also serves to evaluate initiatives carried out within the communities being served to help leaders determine if current health services still meets the needs of the community or whether revisions are necessary.

Highlights from My Practicum Experience:

- Working with an array of knowledgeable and dedicated staff
- Realizing the work still ahead to assure communities in Houston are getting the appropriate care that is needed

Advice for Future Students

Don’t be afraid to share new ideas or discuss concepts that have not been considered, you may bring a fresh perspective to the table that hasn’t been taken into account.

Healthy People

For a better tomorrow today!

Prenatal Education with Star Babies

Job Responsibilities

- Designed curriculum and lesson plans for classes offered through the Texas Children’s Health Plan Star Babies program, including courses on Breastfeeding, classes on Infant Care and Safe Sleep, and Childbirth Education
- Taught classes and hosted community events like baby showers for plan members
- Followed up with course participants and tracked effects of the courses
- Organized materials for teaching the course and for community events

Lessons Learned

Find a practicum that aligns with your interest or life experience— as a new(ish) mom myself, it was wonderful to meet with, support, and talk to other women who were pregnant and worried about new motherhood. I felt like I could offer them knowledge and advice that was vital to my own experience and thus help them make sense of a very confusing and vulnerable time.

Public Health Significance

The Public Health Essential Service (PHES) that most closely relates to my practicum experience is to “inform, educate, and empower people about health issues.”

One of the most important functions of the health educator at the Star Babies program is to educate low-income, high-risk pregnant women and new moms about issues related to pregnancy and new motherhood. Breastfeeding rates among low-income mothers are low, rates of preterm labor are high, and comorbidities like gestational diabetes and hypertension are on the rise. By giving women the tools to have healthier, longer pregnancies and effectively care for their infants and themselves postpartum, the Star Babies program is helping to reduce the prevalence of some of these dangerous pregnancy complications, educate women about how to be healthier postpartum, both physically and mentally, and help new moms provide the best start possible for their babies.

The importance of Prenatal Education

By: Catherine Danziger

The Texas Children’s Health Plan provides educational services for its pregnant members through the Star Babies program. Several courses are taught throughout the week, including classes on breastfeeding, infant care, car seat safety, childbirth education, and a series of courses called “Becoming a Mom”, sponsored by the March of Dimes.

My primary goal as an intern with this program was to assist the health educator in preparing for the courses, teaching them, and following up with participants after the course was over.

I developed lesson plans for topics in the Becoming a Mom classes, modules on postpartum depression and preterm labor, and helped host several community baby showers.

The curricula that I created during my internship will be used after this project is over, and serves as my final “product” and a culmination of the work that I completed while interning for the Health Plan.
Worksite Wellness

Practicum Highlights!

- Creating and presenting an engagement on natural remedies
- Engaging with employees at various health events about nutrition topics

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Get to know your coworkers – they can offer invaluable advice about the field – how to gain employment upon graduation and succeed in your chosen area!

Integrated Health, Inc. Keeps BP Employees Healthy

By: Caroline Gilger

I spent my summer as an intern for Integrated Health, Inc. They are the local wellness team for British Petroleum (BP) here in Houston. I was involved in their programming and education for employees about various nutrition and wellness topics. My final project was the creation and presentation of an engagement on natural remedies. I created an interactive table display to educate employees on natural remedies.

I loved being able to actually present my engagement at health events at the end of my practicum. It was great being able to interact with employees and be the go to person on my topic.

In addition, I was able to assist with other health events throughout the summer. I also helped create educational materials and newsletters that were distributed to employees.

Public Health Significance

The primary public health service that IHI is involved in is “Informing, educating, and empowering people about health issues.” Throughout the summer, I was able to see the different ways IHI educates BP employees about relevant health issues. Not only do they provide employees with information and educate them, but they also make their presentations interactive so that employees are empowered to take action towards being healthy. For example, my engagement educated employees about different natural remedies and gave them examples of how to use those remedies in everyday life, especially in the work setting. My engagement suggested using various herbal teas to cure common ailments such as headaches and stomachaches. In addition, I participated in various other engagements such as, “Super Smoothies,” in which we educated employees about the nutritional benefits of certain fruits and vegetables, and then showed them how to make a smoothie.
Wellness or prevention starts at any age

By: ASMAA HAMMAD

I had the honor of doing my practicum at the Buckingham Houston. At the Buckingham, I was able to learn about the senior population as well as wellness and prevention services. The Buckingham is not the typical retirement community. They are very innovative in their approach. They utilize Masterpiece living (or Successful Aging, which is a theory that addresses living life to the fullest potential. It addresses the physical, mental, spiritual, psychological, and social aspects of living life. This theory postulates that if seniors fulfill all of the components of Masterpiece living, they will live healthier and fuller lives.

I was involved with many duties, but was stationed in independent living. I was responsible for leading fitness classes, assisting in quarterly fitness tests for seniors, and developed a survey for future wellness topics.

Highlights during my practicum

- Even though my contract was in independent living, I was able to venture out in the different areas of the Buckingham.
- There is never a dull moment at the Buckingham.

Public Health Significance

The Buckingham utilizes the majority of the essential services. However, I will highlight several of the Essential Services below:

Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues.

- In the senior population, Alzheimer’s is a huge concern, as well as arthritis, and osteoporosis. The Buckingham was able to address this by doing different activities to enhance memory, as well as seminars on prevention of arthritis, falls, and Alzheimer’s.

Research new issues and innovative solutions to health problems.

- The Buckingham is constantly assessing senior’s health and developing surveys to see what seniors are most concerned about. They come up with new and innovative ways to address these issues.

Assure a component public health and personal care workforce.

- To work at the Buckingham, you must go through several rigorous interviews, which can take months to find the perfect applicant.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

Ask the organization about practicum opportunities, even if they do not state it on their website. I created my own practicum and loved every minute of it. I was offered a job at the end of my experience!
Eating & Activity among Teens (Project Eat III)

Weight-related behaviors among adolescents

By: Rasheed Ibraheem

The division of Obstetrics & Gynecology of University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) is conducting a study on "weight-related behaviors among adolescents" especially eating and physical activity aspects. The aim of the project is to learn about eating among teens: What they eat, sociocultural factors that influence their eating choices, and how closely are they meeting national nutritional recommendations.

The study involves collection of students' surveys, students' height and weight measurements to evaluate BMIs, and other variables from parents, cook managers, physical education teachers, and administrators of each participating school.

In the last four months, a total of four high schools were visited and close to 300 students have been enrolled in the study.

My duties were to administer surveys to students, measure their weights & heights, collect data onto spreadsheet, and analyze data with SPSS. This is a cohort study that will be concluded in the next three years and data collections with appropriate measurements are still on-going.

Eating disorders could lead to unhealthy behaviors related to food and body weight.

Image source: 2012 WebMD, LLC

Public Health Significance

Monitor: Healthy people 2020 objectives for nutrition & obesity aim for an increase in the number of youth meeting recommendations for intakes of fat, calcium, fruit, vegetables, and prevalence of overweight, especially among teens of poor socio-economic backgrounds.

Diagnose & investigate: the longitudinal nature of the study will establish the causal factors/precursors of eating behaviors as teens become increasingly more independent and move to early adulthood. It is important to establish most potent causal factors among minority teens and low SES youth who are susceptible to overweight status and inadequate dietary patterns.

The goals of Project Eat III are:

To check how closely eating, physical activity, and weight status among teens and young adults meet national guidelines for health.

To learn about disparity in nutrition, activity, and weight status by gender, race/ethnicity, and family income.

To identify influences on eating, physical activity, and weight-related behaviors which need to be addressed by nutrition and physical activity programs.

Special events

• As part of the highlights at the site, I was trained and certified in anthropometric weight measurements using Seca scale and height measurements using Shore board for the students.

• Apart from measuring the heights & the heights, students were taught how to evaluate their BMIs.

• Students received $10 gift cards for participating in the study.

Lessons Learned

• I observed that public health leadership skills and evidence-based approach are necessary tools to solve some of the challenges faced by behavioral health among adolescents.

• These are vital to deal with future public health issues.

Proper height assessment

Image source: cdc.gov

Fall 2013. Rasheed Ibraheem. UTMB Obs. & Gyn. Unit, Galveston. Project Eat III
Wellness at Chevron Corporation

Corporate Wellness at Chevron

By: Courtney Karam

During my practicum at Chevron, I focused on several different projects to leverage on the company's primary focus to promote employee cardiovascular health. My primary projects were to plan and implement an awareness campaign to promote the health stations located around each Chevron office in the United States, design the health fair booth for Chevron's incentive-based wellness program, manage and implement health screenings, create new materials and research and develop a social media strategy for the Health and Productivity Department.

At the end of my practicum, I presented my duties and final products to the Health and Productivity Department (about 20 people) during the Health and Productivity Core Team Meeting.

Lessons Learned

• Health programs cannot be successful if it is not effectively promoted and communicated. Being able to write well and interact with people is extremely important in all areas of public health.

Public Health Significance

Chevron has a strong focus on health promotion. Employees are seen as a long-term investment. The company values good employee health to increase worker productivity, decrease long-term costs to the company and keep employees happy.

Of the 10 Essential Public Health Services, my projects focused on researching new innovative solutions and informing, educating and empowering people about health.

One specific example of Chevron’s use of research was my project on developing a social media strategy for public health programs. The department wants to harness these new tools in order to expand communication efforts to promote various health events and programs. By increasing communication channels, the department hopes to increase attendance in health programs and health events and increase health education among employees.
Improving Access to Social Resources - for Patients in the Local Homeless Community

By: Camille Keenan

I worked with HOMES Clinic, a free student-run clinic providing health care for local homeless individuals, and Dr. Andrea Link from the clinic’s parent organization Healthcare for the Homeless Houston (HHH). The clinic had an unorganized list of social resources commonly requested by patients including information on the Gold Card, dental services, vision services, reduced-fare transportation, and other services for the underserved population not provided by the clinic. I collected all of these resources, verified and updated information, and created comprehensive one-page information sheets addressing the most common social needs of our patients. I integrated this information with our clinic website so that students can access the info sheets while at the clinic or whenever interacting with homeless individuals. This way, students have a more efficient way to access the information and patients have a concise outline of the steps/directions needed to accomplish their immediate goals while working towards getting off the streets.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience relates best to the Essential Public Health Services of “Inform, educate, and empower” and “Link.” Student volunteers were “informed, educated, and empowered” by gaining access to the info-sheets created through my practicum. They now have a more efficient way of obtaining correct information to provide to their patients. The benefit to our patients is that these info sheets “link” them to the services they need in order to obtain more sustained health care and hopefully an eventual increase in quality of life. For example, by receiving a comprehensive compilation of the information needed to obtain a Gold Card, patients have a direct link to the services required for accomplishing each step in the process of obtaining a Gold Card, which greatly broadens their options for reduced-cost medical care. Aside from these two services, HOMES Clinic and HHH both also work towards “diagnosing and investigating” health problems in the homeless community.

Lessons Learned

Obtaining valid information on the resources available for the homeless community is a difficult and lengthy process due to lack of centralized information and constantly changing services (since most are non-profit and fluctuate depending on available funding).

Evaluating an implementation may not always be as direct of a measurement as you would like. I would have ideally preferred to follow patients to see if our info sheets improved their likelihood to obtain services, but this proved unrealistic. Instead, I evaluated student knowledge with and without use of the info sheets.

Practicum Highlights

- Social resources at HOMES Clinic were compiled and organized for easier access by student volunteers.
- Social resources were combined into instructional one-page formats that include service address, directions, phone number, and hours for easier patient access.
- One-page info sheets will be utilized in a comprehensive medical care digital resource through collaboration with Doctors For Change (DFC).

Medical students listen to a patient at HOMES Clinic describe his social history and his perceived barriers to getting off the streets.

Pictured: Sarah Shoultz, Caroline Hawes, Stephanie Annor

Photo by: Jessica Dominguez
STAR BABIES: Prenatal Care

The importance of prenatal care

By: Sujana Londhe

During my time with STAR Babies, I focused on helping Frances James-Coleman, my preceptor, in any way with the prenatal classes she taught and researching incentives for members to attend classes.

I provided callers with information on the classes and registered them as needed. I helped with preparing documents, incentives, set up and clean up for classes as well.

I restructured the database for the program and created Excel spreadsheets for various aspects of the program.

I also contacted many organizations and companies and was able to receive samples and incentives through these interactions. These incentives help attract women to attend classes.

My final project is a paper summarizing my amazing experiences with the STAR babies program.

Public Health Significance

One of the essential services of Public Health is to inform, educate and empower people about health issues. STAR Babies classes educate women on various important topics of pregnancy. It also teaches women safe habits to practice with their babies.

Another essential service is mobilizing community partnerships to solve health problems. By reaching out to organizations, I was able to create relationships with companies that provide items like diapers, prenatal massages, healthy foods, diaper rash cream and other necessary items.

I also linked people with personal health services they needed by registering them for prenatal classes that was most appropriate for them.

The Public Health Essential Services are very active and prominent in the STAR Babies program.

“"We can do no great things, only small things with great love.""

- Mother Teresa

Programs that provide free prenatal care like STAR Babies have the power to change the lives of many families.
Practicum Highlights

- To understand advances in Schizophrenia diagnosis and treatment modalities
- To assess the relationship between illicit substance use in schizophrenia and length of stay and discharge medication dosage

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Definitely do your practicum in UT’s Harris County Psychiatric Center if you are interested in mental health aspect. It will be a unique experience where you can see all the textbook cases in front of you.
- Prepare your goals long before you begin your practicum. That will give you a huge satisfaction at the end.

Schizophrenia through the perspective of Public Health

By: Satyajit Mohite

I did my practicum in UT’s Harris County Psychiatric Center (HCPC). Initially I learned the basics of Schizophrenia disease, diagnosis and how hospital setting works. I have been fortunate to attend in-patient clinical rounds by attending Psychiatrist. In HCPC, the approach towards all patients is comprehensive. Team of Psychiatrist, social worker, nurses and medical residents provide a thorough attention for better outcome.

This multidimensional team did also conduct academic discussions after finishing daily rounds. It was always an educational treat to listen and participate in such discussions. Also, I worked on an existing database to assess the relationship between illicit substance use in schizophrenia and length of stay and discharge medication dosage. The database is undergoing statistical analysis to find out the significant correlations.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience involved public health services like Monitor, Diagnose and investigate, Evaluate, and Research, out of standard 10 Public Health Essential Services (PHES). Out of them, I was more intrigued by Evaluate and Research part of PHES. Mental health sector needs continuous evaluation and monitoring to understand the progress or relapse of treatment. Also, research part perceives new spectrum for quick and resolute cure in psychiatric illness like Schizophrenia. During my practicum duration, I worked on these 3 PHES.

HCPC is an in-patient hospital setting where patients with mental illnesses, like schizophrenia, get admitted. It has flawless vision towards the outcome of mental health diseases. In my experience, I saw most of the patients were homeless and poor. But they received the same standard treatment like others. Though there is not much funding for research, meticulous effects from faculty members have been fruitful in context of scientific research paper publications. This will be definitely helpful in future for welfare of affected patients.
Maternal and Child Health – LEND

Leadership Education in Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND)

By: Lama Murad

The LEND is a fellowship program that creates leaders in the field of autism spectrum and other neurodevelopmental disabilities. The curriculum is heavily based on maternal and child health. This program focuses heavily on autism spectrum disorders, which is a group of developmental disabilities defined by significant impairments in social interaction and communication with the presence of unique behaviors or interests.

LEND achievements include:
- Interdisciplinary training
- Promotion of culture competence
- Translation of research to practice

This program teaches the fellows how to implement what they have learned into their future careers.

In this short period, I have learned what kind of leader I am, the importance of early diagnosis, how to work with families, and gained skills regarding care for children with ASD/ND. I will continue this fellowship until June 2014.

Public Health Significance

The LEND program touched on two basic public health principles:
1. Diagnose health problems
2. Inform, educate, and empower individuals

These two principles are relevant because as fellows we are being educated and informed on the importance of child care as early as possible. Diagnosing health problems is also another important principle. Especially for an autism diagnosis because the earlier a diagnosis happens, the faster early childhood intervention can take place.

Advice for Future Students

The only advice I have for future students choosing a practicum is to choose a site or an area that you are passionate about. Because having actual experience may help your future career endeavors.

Practicum Highlights

- Visited clinics around the Houston Medical Center and observed in all aspects of care for children with ASD/ND.
- Was a research assistant for a study called: “Training Adults with High-Functioning Autism to Work with Young Children with Autism”
- Attended didactic seminars presented by experts in the area of ASD.
- Attended a Baylor Conference about the Transition from Pediatric to Adult—based Care
- Took part in a leadership development workshop and a team project with other fellows
- Participated in the Autism Speaks walk

The LEND Program focuses intensely on the importance of family.
Source: Google Images

The LEND Program

The LEND Program focuses intensely on the importance of family.

Source: Google Images
Inform parents about the Health Insurance Marketplace

By: Pen-Chieh Pan

Starting October 1, 2013, the Health Insurance Marketplace provides parents a new way to find affordable health coverage.

Children’s Defense Fund-Texas (CDF-Texas) works closely with community partners to inform the public about the Marketplace.

During my internship at CDF-Texas, I created a three-minute video called “what the Health Insurance Marketplace means for you” as part of the CDF All Healthy Children campaign. I used media advocacy techniques that I learned from course work. My community preceptor and I worked together on designing the messages in the video.

I also drafted the September newsletter to review the health forum held by CDF and partners and to inform people about the Marketplace. Houston Mayor Annise Parker’s speech during the forum was included to stress the importance of the Marketplace.

Public Health Significance

Inform, educate, and empower. The objectives of the video I developed during my internship were not only to educate the public about the Marketplace but also to persuade people to sign up health coverage at the Marketplace. Moreover, CDF-Texas works hard to convey child health policy changes through their website, newsletters, Facebook page, and health forums.

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Developing a School Based Tobacco Prevention Program for 5th Grade Students

This summer I joined a team of tobacco prevention specialists that were developing a tobacco prevention program for fifth grade students in the Leon County school district (Tallahassee, FL). In order to provide comprehensive tobacco prevention, the team wanted to address a gap in prevention education. I performed literature reviews and related research to make suggestions on curriculum components and an evaluation tool. The team decided to combine CDC recommendations for tobacco prevention programs with education benchmarks for 5th graders to develop a 3-part curriculum. We tailored the YBRS to the program goals to create an evaluation tool. My final product was a report on my research findings regarding CDC Best Practices, evidence based prevention strategies, and evaluation instruments.

Public Health Significance

This practicum experience involved the Public Health Essential Services number 3- Inform, Educate & Empower, and number 10- Research. Tobacco prevention specialists researched innovative and evidence based ways to educate 5th graders about tobacco so that they are empowered to make positive health decisions regarding tobacco presently and throughout their lives. School based anti tobacco education is a crucial component of comprehensive tobacco prevention. Since tobacco use is still a major preventable cause of death and disease, early education and prevention efforts are essential to local and national public health.

Practicum Highlights

- Working alongside Department of Health tobacco prevention specialists
- Pitching the program to Department of Education stakeholders

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Look for opportunities in your community, utilize scholastic and social networks, sell yourself, opportunities to work and learn aren't always advertised!

Florida Department of Health in Leon County logo

Via
http://www.co.leon.fl.us/health/index.asp

Florida Department of Health in Leon County

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lorida Department of Health in Leon County logo

Via
http://www.co.leon.fl.us/health/index.asp
For more information regarding The University of Texas School of Public Health, Office of Public Health Practice and the practicum program, please visit:

https://sph.uth.tmc.edu/practicum/