Public Health Practice

Stories from the Field

The University of Texas School of Public Health
Student Practicum Experiences
Fall 2014 – 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 fifteenth-edition e-magazine showcases student practicum experiences throughout the Fall 2014 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: 7

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## Health Promotion & Behavioral Sciences

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HIV Risk Behaviors in Houston MSM Community

Packed Dance Floors, VIP Lounges & Glitter Everywhere: A look into HIV Risk Behavior Research in the MSM Community

By: Cristina Espinosa Da Silva

In this practicum, I was a data collector at local gay bars and clubs for two different surveys relating to HIV risk behaviors in the men-who-have-sex-with-men (MSM) communities in Houston and Dallas.

The first survey is in part an evaluation of the Mpowerment Project, a community-level intervention adapted for young black men who have sex with men.

For the second survey, I conducted 40-minute personal interviews with participants and collected data relating to their sexual behaviors, injection and non-injection drug use, HIV prevention behaviors, and overall psychosocial well-being. For this survey, I also administered rapid HIV tests on-site and notified each participant of the results.

Furthermore, our surveys were designed to learn more about current trends and behaviors in the MSM community that could provide valuable insight into HIV prevalence and incidence rates. The comprehensive surveys contained highly detailed questions that aimed to identify and understand current social norms as well as perceived barriers and benefits of HIV risk prevention.

While many participants gave us positive feedback, this was also a truly incredible experience for me.

Public Health Significance

This practicum encompasses several Essential Services of Public Health, particularly diagnosing and investigating health problems and health hazards in the community.

In addition to providing free rapid HIV tests with results available within 10 minutes, our research team also provided free condoms and information packets regarding free health clinics and other valuable resources for members of the MSM community.

Special events during the practicum

This was a powerful experience in which I learned how to gain the trust of participants, ask highly personal and probing questions into their private lives and all the while ensure the anonymity and integrity of our research. It was invaluable to learn how to communicate difficult health-related information, specifically informing participants for the first time of their HIV positive status.

Advice for Future Students

This is an incredible opportunity to immerse yourself in field research. Take advantage of it! Learn about different prospects and select a practicum that would be stimulating and enriching for you.

Conducting surveys curbside at Club 2020.
Overweight/Obesity in Women with Disability

GoWoman: Weight Management in a Virtual World for Women with Mobility Impairment

By: Rachel Glorsky

Although overweight and obesity are common secondary conditions for women living with disability, there are few interventions that address barriers and facilitators for weight management in this unique population. The Center for Research on Women with Disability (CROWD)’s GoWoman Project is based in a virtual world called Second Life, allowing participants to access program materials and group weight management meetings from home. Each week participants meet at various virtual meeting spaces on the GoWoman Island to learn about diet and exercise while exploring issues of disability and weight management.

In support of the GoWoman Project, I worked primarily in knowledge translation through an academic article discussing weight management in women with disabilities and a series of motivational podcasts designed for women who could benefit from the program’s discussions and findings. I also assisted in facilitating and documenting weekly participant group sessions in the first wave of the program.

Program Highlights

- Observing the positive health changes and the shared encouragement between GoWoman participants
- Interviews with women at the Houston Center for Independent Living’s annual Women With Disabilities Empowerment Fair to gain new perspectives on issues that are important to this population

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Keep an eye on the progress of your final products as you get more involved in and excited about new ideas at your practicum site.

Public Health Significance

Compared to women without disabilities, women with mobility impairment have a 10% increased prevalence of overweight/obesity. However, there are currently no weight management programs that are specifically designed for women with disabilities. When pursuing mainstream weight management strategies, women with disabilities face barriers like lack of transportation, inaccessible facilities, and lack of knowledge about capabilities and skills for exercise, which often hinder efforts for positive diet and exercise change. Because traditional programs are not responsive to the unique needs of this population, the current program is taking a non-traditional, virtual reality/Internet-based approach. The GoWoman Project addresses the essential public health service of informing, educating, and empowering people with public health issues by empowering women with disabilities to take control of their weight management efforts.

As a whole, the Center for Research on Women with Disabilities (CROWD) contributes to public health through research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems. The center has made an incredible impact on the current disability literature by researching new strategies to address secondary health conditions affecting women with disabilities.
Health Disparities Research

Harmony & Health Pilot Study

By: Kisha Goode

My practicum took place at the Health Disparities Research Department of MD Anderson Cancer Centre. I helped out on a brand new pilot study called Harmony & Health. The purpose of the study is to see the effects of stretching and relaxation strategies on physical activity and immune function in inactive African-American adults.

My role involved screening participants over the phone for eligibility, scheduling baseline appointments, providing physician clearance forms, making appointment reminder calls to participants and collecting participant data (blood pressure, height and weight measurements) at in-person baseline appointment visits.

Study enrollment is set to be finished by the end of this year. The actual mind body intervention is scheduled to start in the new year!

Public Health Significance

1. Monitor health status to identify and solve community health problems - The Health Disparities Research Department contributes to public health through cancer prevention research studies geared to minority populations. Through identifying cancer risk factors, the team I worked with designs studies to help reduce cancer risk in African-American adults.

3. Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues - As part of the eligibility screening process, I had an opportunity to provide ineligible participants with education material regarding physical activity. This was an excellent way to inform and educate individuals about ways to stay healthy.

Additionally, I staffed the MD Anderson table at a community event. While working at the table, I was able to share healthy living and cancer screening resources.

Special events/ duties during your practicum

- Attending the Celebration of Life Luncheon for Cancer Survivors. Many in attendance credited MD Anderson for their cancer care!
- Participating in a mock mind body intervention session

Lessons Learned

[OR] Advice for Future Students

- Don’t be afraid to ask questions. It’s the best way to learn new things. While making the most of every opportunity given to you, don’t be shy to make suggestions for new opportunities!

MD Anderson Sign. Photo courtesy of www.mdanderson.org
Quality of Life

Practicum Highlights

- Talking and listening to patients share their personal experiences
- Shadowing physicians involved with patient care and treatment planning
- Seeing patients smile after their last round of treatment
- Sitting in on tumor board meetings with physicians who specialize in different fields of medicine.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Expand your horizons and seek advice from preceptors or mentors at your practicum site, it can be useful in the future.
- Pick a practicum site that you are passionate about and something you can see yourself doing as a career.
- Pay attention to your work ethic and style. We may not always take the time to think about how we work, but by doing so, it will help you make changes to improve your work habits and prepare yourself for the work field!

Quality of Life of Breast Cancer Patients

By: Antoinette Lui

For my practicum experience, I interned with the Houston Methodist Department of Radiation Oncology under the supervision of Dr. Bin Teh, Vice-Chair of Radiation Oncology. The main focus of my practicum was on breast cancer patients and their quality of life. Throughout my experience, I learned the significance of the role that each healthcare team member has in contributing to treatment planning for each breast cancer patient, maintain a report and assess patient quality of life using a validated Quality of Life Instrument provided by the City of Hope National Medical Center & Research Institute. In addition to these duties, I gained an understanding of how physicians and healthcare workers interact and work with their patients. The final product of my work at the practicum site was a compilation of patient responses in regards to Quality of Life.

Public Health Significance

The Radiation Oncology Department at Houston Methodist utilizes several of the Public Health Essential Services (PHES) to improve patients’ health & quality of life. For example, the practicum site focuses on educating and empowering patients about breast cancer. Physicians help educate their patients about breast cancer, and I found this experience to be very rewarding because it raises awareness and helps patients make informed decisions in regarding their health and their quality of life. Empowering these women is important during their battle with breast cancer. Patients undergoing treatment receive support from both the physician and their team of health care workers. Additionally, there are support programs provided at Methodist for breast cancer patients to help current patients connect and share their experiences with other breast cancer patients and other patients who have won their battle with breast cancer.
Innovations for Global Health

Baylor College of Medicine Practicum: Office of the President

By: Kaylinh Ly

I was able to work on several projects throughout the course of this practicum. Most of the issues that I addressed had to do with global health issues. The two major global health topics that I focused on were improved general health education as well as cancer screening and prevention.

The approach that Baylor College of Medicine takes to address these topics is twofold:

**Public Health Significance**

Out of the 10 Essential Services of Public Health, this practicum experience strongly relates to the essential service used for system management “Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems”.

If you are looking for a practicum that will give you creative freedom to develop innovative solutions based on scientific research, this is the practicum for you.

I was able to develop a concept for a smartphone app based on current research and technology that screens for colon, esophageal, and breast cancer. This could be useful in remote areas where there is limited medical access.

I was also able to develop a concept for a smartphone app that allows for easy colorectal cancer (CRC) screening appointment scheduling as well as appointment preparation. This could be useful for increasing the rates of CRC screening and decreasing rates of CRC.

**Special Events**

- Participation in the selection of faculty and students for global health research grants
- Participation in the annual Strategic Planning Meeting
- Coordinating the initial stages of a scholarship program which will allow high school students from developing countries to study at the best institutions in Houston, TX

**Advice for Future Students**

- Be sure to make connections with everyone that you meet during the practicum; you never know what opportunities those connections could lead to!
- Do not be afraid to be as imaginative with your ideas as possible; now is the time to stretch your mind!
Community Gardening in Houston

Practicum Highlights

- Presenting my findings on the development of the guide to the Community Garden Committee
- Assisting in streamlining the community garden volunteer process and redesigning the website in the process

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Always be prepared to adapt to the needs of your organization and be willing to offer your help where needed in your time there. You’ll be surprised what you may learn in the process!!

Guiding Community Gardens for the Future

By: Rachel Markley

During my time at Urban Harvest (UH), my main project was the creation of a companion guide to their “Starting a Community or School Garden” class. The guide details the many steps of beginning a garden from finding land to community engagement. My job was to research similar guides or documents and adapt them to the needs of both UH and Houston.

I specifically was asked to develop the community needs assessment portion of the guide and worked with both the Community Gardens Coordinator and the Director of Education to adapt the assessment to the needs of community gardens.

I learned many things about Houston through this project from its difficult gardening climate to the difficulty in obtaining land to start a community garden.

Though the guide was not published for use in my time at UH, all the documents were developed and I am continuing to work with UH on the guide’s completion.

Public Health Significance

The Public Health Essential Service (PHES) that sticks out to me in terms of what I did at my practicum and what Urban Harvest does overall is mobilizing community partnerships to identify and solve health problems. Community gardening, as shown in the infographic above, increases a community’s access to fresh produce by providing an opportunity for community’s to come together and work towards a common goal; combating obesity and increasing overall health.

In the garden as well as its sustainability. My work on the volunteer process helps provide a connection between volunteers and gardens within their community that, if not for UH, they would not know existed.

UH as an organization, helps to place gardens throughout Houston and keep them operating through provision of supplies and gardening support. They also have other divisions working towards this PHES, through the Farmer’s Markets providing cheaper, healthier products, and education for children and adults, and these are just a few of their many activities.
Are Primary Care Providers Offering HIV Testing to Patients?

By: Beverly Patuwo

Along with my mentor, Dr. Monisha Arya, I was able to conduct a complete public health study at Strawberry Health Center in Pasadena, Texas. The study explored whether PCPs were following the latest CDC recommendations for routine opt-out HIV testing.

Throughout the practicum, I was able to create the paper survey tool, edit and submit IRB protocols, enlist patient volunteers and conduct the survey, help analyze the statistical results, and help write and edit the final paper for journal submission as second author.

The final product of this practicum is a journal article published in the peer reviewed journal AIDS Patient Care and STDs. Link to the article is below: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3335132/

Public Health Significance

In the United States, over 1 million people are infected with HIV and there are approximately 50,000 new infections every year. HIV testing is extremely important in HIV prevention because those aware of their HIV status greatly decrease their risky behaviors, and thereby decrease potential transmission.

In 2006, the CDC issued new recommendations that state that HIV testing should be routine for all patients aged 18-64 years visiting a PCP. In this study, of the 106 participants, only 25.5% reported discussing HIV testing with their PCP. In addition of those who did discuss HIV testing, only 27% reported receiving an HIV test during their visit.

This study showed not only the lack of offering HIV testing among Hispanic patients in a community health center, but also the lack of acceptance of HIV testing among this population. More initiatives to educate this community regarding the HIV testing is needed.
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/