Public Health Practice

Stories from the Field
The University of Texas School of Public Health
Student Practicum Experiences
Fall 2014 – Regional Campuses
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: 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours per Week per Student</th>
<th>Approximately 12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campuses</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Austin Regional Campus**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infectious Disease Surveillance</td>
<td>Miranda Freeman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Gonorrhea Surveillance</td>
<td>Traci Hise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood Obesity in Central Texas</td>
<td>Aubri Kottek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Health &amp; Safety</td>
<td>Rachael Perriello</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Dallas Regional Campus**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Systematic Literature Review</td>
<td>Erin Taylor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pediatric Emergency Department Use</td>
<td>Cynthia Williams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**San Antonio Regional Campus**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long Acting Reversible Contraception</td>
<td>Daniel Chiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy of HCV Screening</td>
<td>Katie Craig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Park Service Search &amp; Rescue</td>
<td>Cord Cunningham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT’S TIME TEXAS Walking Program</td>
<td>Caroline Hilbert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreasing Surgical Site Infections</td>
<td>Kimberly Majoy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hepatitis C Screening Program</td>
<td>Vidhi Makanji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetic Related Amputation – A burden</td>
<td>Smita Tiwari</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Public Health Significance

My practicum experience is most closely related to two Public Health Essential Services. These are (1) Monitor health status to identify and solve community health problems and (2) Assure competent public and personal health care workforce.

The goal of the project I was involved in was to create new educational materials (i.e. webinars) that would be more readily available to health department staff. Ultimately, this will help strengthen the public health workforce and aid in surveillance efforts.

With these additional training resources in place, the DSHS will be more apt to monitor cases of infectious disease and identify outbreaks in Texas communities.

Helping Strengthen Texas Health Departments through the Creation of NEDSS Webinar Trainings

By: MIRANDA FREEMAN

Health departments across the state of Texas utilize the National Electronic Disease Surveillance System (NEDSS) to report and monitor the incidence of infectious disease. Having the proper knowledge and training on how to use NEDSS is essential in ensuring that surveillance is properly performed.

To help ensure that public health professionals have access to the necessary training, I worked with the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) in the Infectious Disease Control Unit to create a webinar. The first in a series of online training videos, the webinar focuses on how to utilize the different reports available in NEDSS and was assembled by utilizing past training materials.

The hope is that by making these webinars available online, professionals that are unable to attend training in person due to budget restrictions may still have access to educational resources.

Disease surveillance is essential in allowing public health professionals to gauge the health of communities.


Lesson Learned

• Don’t be afraid to ask for help! Looking for practicum opportunities can seem daunting but don’t hesitate to reach out to organizations you’re interested in working with. Most people are more than willing to help you.

Image Source: https://tamretail.wordpress.com/2014/02/10/tam-webinar-training-series/
Community Gonorrhea Surveillance

Special events/duties during your practicum
- 84.7% of health care providers responded by the data collection deadline date of Nov 14th
- By providing an explanation behind the importance of gathering patients’ demographic information in our letter, we hope to see an increase of race & ethnicity reporting from these providers in the future

My Practicum Experience at the Austin-Travis County Health and Human Services Department

By Traci Hise

My practicum revolved around a project to gather missing race and/or ethnicity information for gonorrhea cases in our community reported in 2013. Information about race and/or ethnicity was unknown for approximately 36% of gonorrhea cases that year.

With the help of my preceptor and other members of the city health department, I attempted to contact the health care providers for the 734 patients whose reports were missing race and/or ethnicity. Providers were sent a letter that asked them to fax us the missing information and explained the importance of gathering patients’ demographic information from a public health perspective. I created and managed a database for the project and performed data analysis.

My final product for my practicum site will be a presentation about the project at the weekly surveillance meeting on Dec. 15th.

Lessons Learned
• The categories of races and ethnicities used in public health surveillance are not well-understood by many health care workers, and might require further explanation

Public Health Significance

The public health service that was the focus of my practicum is monitoring health status to identify community health problems. Specifically, my project dealt with monitoring trends in gonorrhea amongst different races and ethnicities in our community. This is a necessary function of public health to be able to assess health disparities of the community and have targeted prevention strategies. However, health disparities in the community cannot be assessed when the information for that assessment is not available, which was the case for the missing race and/or ethnicity information for local gonorrhea cases.

The city health department has an STD prevention program that holds events and reaches out to areas in our community associated with groups known to be at a higher risk for contracting sexually transmitted diseases.

Fall 2014 • Traci Hise • Austin-Travis County Health & Human Services Department • Race & Ethnicity of Gonorrhea Cases
Understanding Disparities in Referred Patients

By: Aubri Kottek

I interned at the Texas Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Childhood Obesity (TCPTCO) at Dell Children’s Medical Center of Central Texas. The TCPTCO offers several different childhood obesity programs to overweight and obese children and families in Central Texas – everything from individually tailored, multidisciplinary clinical support to family groups for kids and teenagers. I was tasked with establishing a database of all current patients referred to TCPTCO’s programs and analyzing demographics of referred patients and referring providers. The objective of the project is to better understand which providers and practices are not referring patients, where patients are coming from, and if there are any disparities in patients that are referred in comparison to the specific demographics of childhood obesity rates in Central Texas.

Public Health Significance

My practicum projects were most closely related to three of the Essential Services of Public Health: (1) inform, educate, and empower people about health issues, (2) mobilize community partnerships to identify and solve health problems, and (3) evaluate effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of healthcare services. The referred patients database and demographic analysis serves to ensure that TCPTCO is effectively accessing patients who need their services. TCPTCO offers many programs, such as HLHL, that link clinical care to health education and support. Their multidisciplinary team assists families struggling with overweight or obesity on all fronts – healthy eating practices, physical education and activity, behavioral health, and familial involvement – in empowering families to make healthier choices together. Soliciting community partners for the Choose Healthier app mobilized the Austin community around the significance of making healthy living the norm in Central Texas.
Developing Solutions for Workplace Safety
By: Rachael Perriello

My practicum site was a private in vitro diagnostics R&D and manufacturing company in Stillwater, Minnesota.

I worked within the EHS (Environment, Health, and Safety) department on a few different projects, the first of which was creating an internal safety audit program using Microsoft Access that would enable tracking of safety audit data over time.

I also worked with representatives from other departments to modify our current driver safety rules to include defensive driving guidelines.

My final project was gathering information on and developing updated procedures for Lockout/Tagout of equipment within the facility.

I am lucky to now be employed at my practicum site and see that my solutions continue to be used and will help ensure employee safety into the future.

Public Health Significance

Some of the Essential Public Health services that I have performed during my time at my practicum include: monitoring health status, diagnosing and investigating health problems, informing, educating, and empowering employees about health issues, developing policies and programs, and enforcing laws and regulations.

My safety audit program was built in order to track leading indicators to be addressed before accident or injury occurs.

I was also involved in assisting with response and investigations after reports of employee illness or injury or chemical or biological spills.

I provided training and was involved in the multi-departmental safety committee where we actively solicit employee feedback on safety concerns.

I helped to create and modify policies, such as the driving policy for sales personnel.

My work helped the company follow FDA, DEA, OSHA, EPA, and all other laws and regulations that affect the workplace.

Lessons Learned & Advice for Future Students

• Don’t give up on finding a paid practicum/internship, but be prepared to submit a lot of applications and resumes to get there!
• Don’t be afraid to go somewhere completely new!
• Hard work at your practicum site can lead to employment!
Public Health Significance

The essential services of Public Health that I will gained experience in this semester were 1. Inform, educate and empower people about health issues, 2. Link people to needed personal health services and assure the provision of health care when otherwise unavailable, and 3. Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems. Through my work conducting a literature review of peer-based motivational interviewing interventions, my professor and I helped to contribute to a larger body of work on motivational interviewing interventions which will help to inform new programs utilizing peer-lead motivational interviewing techniques that aim to improve health.

In addition, the cognitive interviewing sessions that we conducted are helping to inform, educate and empower people about the clinical trial drug that they are consenting to take.

Lesson Learned

I learned that in intervention implementation, things don’t always go according to the timeline that you laid out. You must be flexible and work through different challenges and barriers as they arise.

Systematic Literature Review

During my practicum, I worked with a professor at the UT School of Public Health: Dallas Regional Campus to conduct a literature review on peer-based motivational interviewing interventions. In addition, I worked with the Department of Clinical Sciences team at UT Southwestern to conduct cognitive interviews on patient consent forms for a clinical trial.

Recognizing a need to compile and better understand the research on peer-to-peer motivational interviewing interventions, my professor and I worked with the librarian at UTSPH to pull and analyze peer-reviewed research articles that met our criteria for review.

In addition, through my work in observing the cognitive interview process, I was able to better understand what it would look like to work in a research-based setting and the projects that they worked on.

By: Erin Taylor

The graphic provides an overview of the steps when conducting a systematic literature review. 1) Choose your topic, 2) Identify databases and resources, 3) Search and refine, 4) Read and analyze, and 5) Write the review.

Photo Credit: (n.d.). Retrieved from research.library.gsu.edu
**Pediatric Emergency Department Use**

**Overview of URI’s and Fever in the Children’s HealthSM Children’s Medical Center Emergency Department**

**By: Cynthia Williams**

For my practicum with the Injury Prevention Service at Children’s Medical Center Dallas, I looked at data gathered from the emergency department (ED) in the past year (October to October) and created reports of demographics and ED utilization patterns in order to help the research team better understand how patients aged 18 and under are utilizing the ED for upper respiratory infections and fevers. This research is being conducted in an effort to reduce non-urgent visits to the ER through patient education and assessment of why they come to the ED instead of seeing their primary care physician.

What needs to be done next, similar to what is currently being done by the research team for fever, is an assessment of parental knowledge, concerns, and barriers to seeing their primary care physician for pediatric upper respiratory infections.

**Public Health Significance**

The Injury Prevention Service at Children’s Medical Center embodies many of the core functions of public health, including research that is done in the emergency department, linking people to needed health services and informing people about health issues through the community health workers, and investigating health hazards to solve problems in the community through their drowning prevention and car seat safety programs.

For my project specifically, by analyzing data and looking for patterns in ED use, the core public health functions that are addressed are research for solutions to health problems and investigation and identification of health issues.

**Advice for Future Practicum Students**

The small datasets I worked with in statistics classes were nothing compared to these (these had thousands of individuals!). It is a little scary at first, but try not to get too overwhelmed. Don’t be afraid to ask for help in figuring out what the data means.

**Source:** https://www.organicfacts.net/home-remedies/home-remedies-for-fever.html

**Child with fever**

**Highlight:**

- Being a part of a very collaborative team
- Participating in the research team’s Fever Roundtable
Long Acting Reversible Contraception

**Public Health Significance**

Public Health Essential Service(s) (PHES) that most closely relates to this project is “Evaluate effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services. LARC is clearly more effective than other forms of hormonal contraception currently available.

Unwanted Pregnancy is a significant public health issue. LARC (Nexplanon and Mirena) are safe and effective forms of hormonal contraception that have higher rates of success compared to other forms of contraception.

**By Daniel Chiles**

Working with Dr. David Klein from Fort Belvoir Community Hospital in VA via VTC, we conducted an exhaustive literature review of current LARC utilization. We then initiated the IRB process through SAMMC and wrote an initial proposal for medical record database review of current LARC utilization in active duty females and female dependents of reproductive age.

The end product of this effort will be to review the military medical database over the past six years to describe LARC utilization in females of reproductive age.

**LARC utilization In Military Active Duty Females and Female Dependents.**

**Institutional Review Board**

- Initiated first experience going through an IRB for research approval
- Manuscript Proposal created

- Nexplanon and Mirena are superior in unwanted pregnancy prevention.
- LARC has higher continuation rates than other forms of hormonal contraception.
Efficacy of HCV Screening

Practicum Highlights

- Meeting with Dr. Bosworth to discuss community-based research
- Meeting with Dr. Ahluwalia to discuss networking and practical applications of research findings

How Finding out you are Hep C Positive Impacts your Life

By: Katie Craig

There is a new push to screen baby boomers for HCV upon hospital admission. Research shows that this can have a positive financial impact on long-term care. However, there is no research about the impact this screening has on the patients who find they are Hepatitis C positive.

My practicum was designed to find the impact of this screening on these patients. I helped design a qualitative research study, got IRB approval, met with several experts in the qualitative research field, and helped recruit participants for the first of 3 focus groups that will meet on December 10th.

The purpose of these focus groups is to gather information from the Hepatitis C positive patients about their initial reaction to the diagnosis, how and if the diagnosis has changed anything, and their thoughts about treatment and the future of Hepatitis C screening.

Public Health Significance

My practicum relates closely to the Public Health Essential Service of evaluating the effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services. We are evaluating the efficacy and impact of Hepatitis C screening, which is a service offered to all in-patient baby boomers at University Hospital. This screening program is spreading to several clinics in the San Antonio area as well as hospitals in the valley.

The focus groups allow us to evaluate this screening program from the view of the patient. The feedback we get from the study participants will allow us to offer recommendations for future screenings as well as inform the way we conduct our current screenings.

The new cure for Hepatitis C is a wonderful innovation, however the cost will prevent many from seeking treatment. This focus group will also determine what the participants think about treatment and what would make it more accessible to them.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Choose good project sponsor because this is a great opportunity to learn from a mentor who is an expert in their field.
- Choose an area of research/study that interests you- this will ensure that you are passionate and driven in your work, making the entire experience much more enjoyable and fruitful.

This is the University Hospital where the baby boomer Hepatitis C screening program started in San Antonio. http://www.universityhealthsystem.com/
As an Army emergency medicine physician, my specific area of focus was preparing for medical direction of military prehospital emergency services during international humanitarian and stability operations as well as Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA) during disaster operations.

### Public Health Significance

The essential public health services that this practicum addressed include:

- **Enforce laws and regulations that protect health and ensure safety:** Instruction and certification in Advanced Incident Command System (ICS)-300 as ICS is mandated by the National Response Framework (NRF)
- **Link people to needed personal health services and assure the provision of health care when otherwise unavailable:** Planning for and providing emergency services on NPS land where it would otherwise be unavailable.
- **Assure competent public and personal health care workforce:** Trained with and provided remote and wilderness medical training to first responders, wild land firefighters, NPS Ranger EMTs and Paramedics.
- **Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems:** Conducted multiple reviews and after action reports of successful and unsuccessful search and rescue operations in addition to conducting several training search and rescue operations from planning to execution.

### Advice for Future Practicum Students

"We succeed only as we identify in life, or in war, or in anything else, a single overriding objective, and make all other considerations bend to that one objective."  *Dwight D Eisenhower*

With enough drive, preparation, and planning, the practicum can be anything we want to focus on in public health.
IT’S TIME TEXAS Walking Program

Project Development: A Walking Program
By: Caroline Hilbert, MD

At IT’S TIME TEXAS, an Austin, Texas, health promotion non-profit, I took part in multiple projects and events focused on increasing healthy behavior among Texans. This organization uses social media, health education, advocacy work, campaigns, and initiatives to promote their statewide cause. As a programs intern, my primary project was to create a framework for a brand new walking program.

For the walking program, I led a team of 3 programs interns in conducting a comprehensive literature review of the successes and issues in other evidence-based exercise programs. Based on this information, we developed a basic outline of IT’S TIME TEXAS’ future walking program.

My final product was an evaluation portfolio which included the following: a summary of the literature review, a program description piece, and strategies for measuring how well the program meets its objectives.

Public Health Significance

The IT’S TIME TEXAS programs department focuses on informing, educating, and empowering individuals about health issues through various school and community-based programs. During my semester with IT’S TIME TEXAS, I contributed to Teach Healthier, a school-based app which increases easy access to physical activity and Choose Healthier, a mobile app focused on increasing community awareness of local healthy opportunities, along with several other projects.

However, since my fellow interns and I created the walking program from scratch, our primary public health focus was on research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems, particularly, sedentary behavior.

Compiling evidence on previous programs and topics such as program sustainability, incentive effectiveness, and the physiologic effects of walking allowed us to create an evidence-based program structure for the near future.
Reducing Surgical Site Infections (SSI’s)

Practicum Highlights

• Learning about the American College of Surgeons, National Surgical Quality Improvement Program (ACS-NSQIP) and how it can be used to improve surgical care.

• The opportunity to be a part of a multidisciplinary work group at a nationally recognized teaching hospital.

• Assisting with the development of patient education materials designed to educate and empower.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

• Do not be afraid to pursue unique practicum opportunities. Decide what is important to you, and talk to anyone you can. People are often very willing to help you. This practicum was the perfect opportunity for me and presented itself somewhat by accident.

An Intervention to Decrease Surgical Site Infections: Developing a Surgical Care Bundle

By Kimberly Majoy

At this practicum site I was able to assist in the development of a surgical care bundle (SCB) designed to reduce the rate of SSI’s at University Hospital in San Antonio.

Using risk-adjusted data collected through ACS-NSQIP, it was determined that the rate of SSI’s at this site was higher than projected. A SSI Task Force was established to implement a plan for remediation. A SCB was developed with the goal of reducing the rates of infection in colon surgery patients by 50% over the next year.

The project required the collaboration of multiple divisions of UTHSCSA and UHS. I spent the majority of my time working with the Department of Surgery and the Quality Improvement Departments.

My primary duties were assisting with research into evidence-based “best practices” as well as developing and formatting appropriate patient education materials.

The final product for this project was a report detailing the background, evidence, and processes of the intervention.

Public Health Significance

Public Health Essential Services addressed with this project:

• Monitor health status by collecting/analyzing ACS-NSQIP data
• Diagnose and investigate by using this data to determine what we were facing and why
• Inform, educate, empower by developing educational materials for patients/staff

• Develop policies and plans to move forward in a systematic fashion
• Research to determine the best strategies for SSI reduction at our facility

Projected impact:

• Reduction of morbidity and mortality
• Increased awareness
• Decreased healthcare costs
Hepatitis C Screening Program

Qualitative Study on the Efficacy of a Hep C Screening Program

By: Vidhi Makanji

Hepatitis C is very prevalent among the baby-boomer population. Due to its chronic, asymptomatic presentation, many of those infected do not know they have the virus until their liver has become cirrhotic.

As a result, a screening program was initiated at University Hospital to test all patients born between 1945 and 1965. There is minimal research on the efficacy of such screening programs. My practicum dealt with designing a qualitative study to evaluate the screening program. I also worked closely with experts in the field of qualitative research. Through the practicum, I also learned how to complete IRB forms and obtain approval.

A focus group with patients positive for Hep C is scheduled for Wednesday, December 10th.

Public Health Significance

Since the practicum dealt with screening vulnerable populations for a specific disease, one of the essential services that related to the project is monitor health status to identify (and solve) community health problems.

The practicum also related to evaluating the effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services.

The practicum also helped inform, educate, and empower people about health issues.

The project contributes to public health by identifying a population vulnerable to a specific disease and helping them receive the care they need. It also contributes to public health by allowing those affected by the disease and the screening program to share their thoughts and experiences.

The ReACH center, as a whole contributes to public health by working on projects that reduce health disparities in the San Antonio area.

Special events/duties during the practicum

- Lunch meeting with Dr. Jasjit Ahluwalia and discussing with him the benefits being an MD/MPH student.
- Meeting with Dr. Hayden Bosworth and hearing his ideas on how to conduct qualitative research.

Lessons Learned [OR] Advice for Future Students

- IRB approval takes a much longer time than I had originally anticipated. If you require approval, START EARLY!
Diabetic Related Amputation - A burden

Developing Intervention for improving "Quality of life, treatment management and depression among Diabetic amputees in San Antonio Area

- Smita Tiwari

My practicum at UTSA, Dept of Health disparity is much more than a practicum, It is a real life experience for me. We started with following goals- 1. To understand the characteristics of people who undergo diabetics’ related amputation in San Antonio 2. Factors associated with higher rates of amputations 3. Designing a methodology and developing a survey to collect data from diabetic amputees from San Antonio 4. Understanding the literature on quality of life, treatment management and depression among amputees

My work started with reading all the literature and previous work done by Dr. Sunil Thankam and his team. In addition to the previous work, we are working together to develop an intervention for reducing risk of amputation in diabetic patients using Social behavior models.

Special events/duties/highlights during practicum

- Designing survey was a challenge, key is Empathy.

Public Health Significance

Over 8.3% of the population in United States are affected by Diabetes. It is estimated that 7 million people in the United States are undiagnosed, and are therefore going without proper treatment and diabetes management. If the disease is left untreated it can cause severe nerve damage, kidney damage, retinal damage, heart disease, and more. In 2013 in the U.S., the estimated cost of diabetes was $245 billion dollars. In 2010, 1.9 million new cases of diabetes were diagnosed in people aged 20 or older in the United States. This is the equivalent of 6,225 individuals being diagnosed with diabetes every 24 hours. By the year 2030 an estimated 552 million people will be living with diabetes. [1][2][3]

"The Institute of Health Disparity, UTSA partners with agencies (SAMHD, UHS, Texas Diabetes, Institute, etc.) to address the unequal distribution and prevalence of adverse health conditions existing in Texas and the nation".[2]

My practicum project aims at "Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems".

Lessons Learned [OR] Advice for Future Practicum Students

"Consistency is the key for success".
"After selecting a topic, the next step should be literature review, it avoids duplication of work and saves time and energy".

Reference:-
1. Stephanie Tapia, A Study of Individuals with Diabetes and Diabetic Related Amputations in the San Antonio Area. UTSA
2- UTSA website (http://colfa.utsa.edu/IHDR/)
3-UTSA website (http://colfa.utsa.edu/sociology/centers )

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/