Public Health Practice

Stories from the Field
The University of Texas School of Public Health
Student Practicum Experiences
Spring 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 tenth-edition e-magazine showcases student practicum experiences throughout the Spring 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: 6

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### Health Promotion & Behavioral Sciences

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Boosted Break Stress Management Study

By: Omotola Akintola

The Booster Break Stress Management Study is a research project which is being conducted in collaboration with the University of Texas Employee Assistance Program (UTEAP).

The project focuses on the design, implementation and evaluation of short work breaks also known as ‘Booster breaks’. This is aimed at reducing stress and sedentary behavior in the workplace. The rationale for this initiative is the findings by research that, over 68% of UT employees were at risk for elevated stress (UTHSC Health Risk Assessment 2010). In addition, there are very few opportunities for employees to reduce ‘sitting-time’ while at work.

Amidst other duties, I am currently assisting my community preceptor- the assistant director of UTEAP- with various aspects of participant recruitment and data collection.

Public Health Significance

UTEAP is primarily concerned with worksite wellness, and delivers a number of other public health services to UT employees and external clients. Some of these services include the following:

- To monitor the psychosocial and overall health of UT employees in order to identify and help solve any personal, emotional or family problems that may arise.
- To develop the right policies and plans for optimal health in the workplace.
- To link UT employees and their families to needed personal health services, as well as assure the best standards of healthcare.

These are a few components of the essential services of public health which the Booster Break Stress Management Study helps fulfill.

Practicum Highlights

- I reviewed published literature of research instruments used in other worksite wellness programs, in order to help design our study questionnaire.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

Through this practicum, I have gained valuable first-hand research experience, so it was definitely worth the time (plenty of it!) and effort. I also think it’s important to do a practicum in one’s area of interest so that you will be sure to enjoy it. Finally, prepare to watch yourself evolve into a well-rounded public health professional!
Memorable Experiences

- Being able to give medical students a forum to express themselves comfortably.
- Learning the differences within diversity.
- Diverse backgrounds collaborating to achieve greatness.

Words of Wisdom

- Have an open mind when choosing & beginning your practicum experience. The experience will impact different aspects of your life, adding a strength that will last with you. Best of luck!

Significance of Diversity

This experience related to several essential public health services, including:

- Diagnosing & Investigating
- Inform, educate & empower
- Develop policy & plans
- Evaluate
- Research

Since our department is in its infant stages of development, the institution is unaware of our mission.

By having conducted this process, we are not only promoting our cause but also informing. By conducting interview/group sessions on campus, we are investigating & identifying gaps & differences that exist.

After a comprehensive evaluation and the publishing of our results, diversity practices & policies will be created & implemented with the aid and support of our Dean.
Community Transformation Initiative

Making Houston and Harris County a more livable city

By: Lowrell Bellard

My practicum experience took place at the City of Houston Department of Health and Human Services. I served as the communication intern for health planners working on a Community Transformation Initiative (CTI). CTI is a “movement” that is happening all across the nation to reduce rates of chronic disease amongst Americans. This reduction is done by implementing policies, providing preventive care and through environmental interventions.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience allowed me to perform 2 out of the ten Essential Services of Public Health. The first was to develop policies and plans. CTI is more concerned about implementing policies throughout the City of Houston and Harris County that could help in the reduction of chronic disease to its residents. These types of policies include smoke-free college campuses or worksites and complete streets in certain areas.

My main responsibilities while working on CTI were to craft and edit CTI material, such as fact sheets, for distribution to current and potential stakeholders. Furthermore, I worked with internal and external entities to develop evaluation tools for capacity building activities. In addition, my final project was to research and develop content for the CTI webpage on the City of Houston’s website.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

Be sure to start looking for a practicum experience as soon as you can. Beginning your search early will allow you to find something that really interests you so that the experience is a rewarding one. You should leave your practicum with tools to progress in the Public Health field!

Practicum Highlights

- Participated in a “Healthy Community Design Workshop” with guest speaker Mark Fenton
- Creating and editing content for the CTI webpage

Community Transformation Initiative artwork that can be found on all distributed material
Source: http://www.houstontx.gov/health/communitytransformation/index.html
Public Health Significance

CDH relates to several of the Essential Services of Public Health. These include inform, educate and empower people about health issues, mobilize community partnerships to identify and solve health problems and research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems. I also believe that CDH can relate to other services, it just depends on what type of project they are working on. The service of mobilizing community partnerships most closely relates to my experience because the whole idea is to bring the resources to the community. We ask them what they need or are missing in their neighborhood and then we connect them with the resources. For example, Fifth Ward said they needed more accessibility to fresh fruits and vegetables so CDH found a local vendor to try out a mobile produce unit at a park. Also, once a corner store is chosen, CDH will use the local vendor to provide the produce and refrigeration at the location.

CAN DO Houston: Avenues for Involvement

By: Celia Gaitz

CAN DO Houston (CDH) stands for Children and Neighbors Defeat Obesity. CDH currently works in 5 neighborhoods in the Houston area using a Community Based Participatory Research approach. In Fifth Ward I started off collecting surveys from customers that came to our Mobile Produce Unit to purchase low cost fresh fruits and vegetables. I worked in the North side completing corner store assessments, spark park observations at Lyons Elementary and helped with a garden build at Berry Elementary. I also attended GO Neighborhood meetings for the safety, culture and health teams. In Independence Heights, I attended collaborative meetings and workshops at the new Beauty’s Garden. In Magnolia Park, I attended Zumba classes and helped to perform physical assessments for participants. Using Spanish is a plus, but not required.

Lessons Learned

[OR] Advice for Future Students

• Take advantage of any opportunities your practicum site provides you with!
• Practice those Spanish skills or any other languages that are useful at your site.

Special events/
duties during your practicum

• Lyons Elementary Health Fair
• Pieces of the Puzzle: Childhood Obesity Conference
• Attend biweekly intern meetings and keep a weekly log of action items

Spring 2013 • Celia Gaitz • CAN DO Houston • Childhood Obesity Prevention
Adherence in Pediatric Cancer Survivors

Examining Barriers to Follow Up Care in Pediatric Cancer Survivors

By: Gena Mathew

The purpose of the Adherence Study conducted by Texas Children's Hospital is to provide a better understanding of what the barriers are for patients and their caregivers to continue their health care visits, and how to improve long term follow-up care for patients with childhood cancer.

The practicum site was at Texas Children's Hospital Clinical Cancer Center and Feigin Center.

Public Health Significance

The Public Health Essential Services that are most closely related to my practicum experience are “evaluate effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services” and “research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems.”

Through the semi-structured phone interviews, we are able to assess the barriers and facilitators for patients and their caregivers to continue to come back to Texas Children’s Cancer Center Clinic to receive their follow up care. This information can then be used to further improve the clinic in various ways in order to provide the follow up care that patients need, and to potentially set up intervention programs for pediatric cancer patient survivors and their families.

Ultimately, the results of this Adherence Study may be used to help investigators better understand what can be done to improve follow up care for pediatric cancer survivors.

Advice for Future Students

• Utilize every opportunity your practicum offers in order to have the most educational and enriching practicum experience.
Corporate Wellness and Workplace Healthcare

The Value of Worksite Wellness

By: Nimish Paripatyadar

My practicum experience primarily consisted of assisting the Texas Children’s Hospital (TCH) Employee Health and Wellness Clinic with various activities planned (predominately with the Wellness team). This team focused on delivering various wellness services to TCH employees on-site in order to improve their overall health.

The main activities involved the development of an on-site fitness class program for TCH employees (collaborated with YMCA instructors), assisting in the development of a Diabetes Management Program, and creating the framework for a Fruits & Vegetables program for future use.

Public Health Significance

The wellness team at TCH is primarily focused on the following Essential Public Health services: Assurance and Empowerment.

These were accomplished through several types of events:

- **Diabetes Management Program**: Pilot program designed for diabetic TCH employees, which involves counseling from certified diabetes educators and registered dieticians. Program includes nutrition counseling, glucose monitoring tips, weight management, and exercise tips.
- **On-site Fitness Program**: This consisted of YMCA instructors conducting various fitness classes across TCH campuses (Boot Camp, Zumba, Night Club Cardio, Walking Club, etc.). TCH currently has no dedicated fitness center for employees on-site, so this was a well-received program. The TCH wellness team strove to provide services to empower employees to make better choices in the future.

Highlights from the Practicum

- Learning to develop worksite wellness programs from the ground up, from the middle, and from the end.
- Understanding the process to identify the necessary stakeholders, plan stakeholder meetings, and solve problems to implement programs.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

Take time to learn about each practicum opportunity before committing—choosing one where you are invested and excited about the work will make the experience better!
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/