Public Health Practice

Stories from the Field
The University of Texas School of Public Health
Student Practicum Experiences
Spring 2013 – Management, Policy & Community Health
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:** 15

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## Management, Policy & Community Health

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Evidence-based secondary prevention program designed to prevent disease in high risk children.

By: Tosin Ariyo

MEND: Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do it! is a project aimed at secondary prevention of disease in high risk children.

Overweight and obese children are screened by a pediatrician, and then they and their families are invited to participate in a 12-month family-based weight management program.

The families are then referred to the MEND program, which are weekly classes delivered at local YMCAs, consisting of a moderate physical activity session for the children, and nutrition education for children and their caregivers.

My roles on this project were to; (i) assist in process evaluation by attending and observing the classes, (ii) participate in collection of baseline and follow-up anthropometric and knowledge assessment data.

Public Health Significance

In context of the public health essential services, this project:

- Diagnosed and investigated the needs of children between ages 2 and 12 in ethnically diverse and underserved communities
- Informed, educated, and empowered these children and their families through the nutrition and physical activity programs
- Mobilized families and communities to support the program

- Evaluated the efficiency and quality of the outcomes, for proposed replication in other communities.

- Researched for other factors that would facilitate early detection and effective management of obesity.

http://www.bcm.edu/news/item.cfm?newsID=4504
https://sph.uth.edu/research/centers/dell/texas-cord/
http://www.apha.org/programs/standards/performancestandardprogram/essentialservices.html

HIGHLIGHTS

- ‘Fabulous food fest’: families were provided with a list of healthy recipes, from which each chose one and the class had a ‘potluck.’
- Supermarket tour: MEND ‘detectives’ roamed the aisles of grocery stores identifying ‘MEND-friendly’ options.
- CDC officials pay a visit

- Childhood obesity is a bigger problem than anyone would imagine. On the bright side, however, children are very enthusiastic and cooperative in adopting healthy behaviors...on this we can place our hope.”
Teen Sexual Health Education

Practicum Highlights

• At the start, our team conducted an informal needs assessment during which we talked with clinic workers, health providers, and patients. From the teens, we learned that many of them received information about STIs and contraceptives from the internet and wished that they had a more reliable source.

• My classmates created and edited the script together. We also filmed everything at the TCH Women’s Pavilion which was both hard work and a lot of fun!

Lessons Learned

• Public Health in practice is harder than theory. You may have great ideas and actually execute those great ideas but whether your final product is actually implemented is often dependent on someone else who may not share your same aspirations or ideas.

My Experience
By: Jacklyn Cheng

I received a waiver for my practicum for previous work. As part of the required coursework for Baylor College of Medicine, every medical student is required to take the Longitudinal Ambulatory Care Experience course. For the 2011-2012 academic year, I applied and was accepted to the "Care of the Underserved Track." As part of this track, we met weekly to for journal club discussions and site visits to free clinics and NGOs in the Houston area. We also spent several weeks working with physicians serving underserved communities.

Also as part of the track, we were required to complete a project that focused on underserved populations. Our group worked on a project with Baylor Teen Health Clinic, a clinic that provides reproductive healthcare (including STI treatment/prevention, contraceptives) to adolescent males and females for little or no cost. We created a self-produced video specific which included information and misconceptions about contraceptives and STIs. It provided reliable information at a level of language that teens would be able to understand and in a format accessible by this same age group.

Public Health Significance

The primary essential function that my addressed was that it informed, educated, and empowered people about health issues. Many of the teens that we talked to at the Baylor Teen Health Clinic received most of their information about STIs and contraceptive information from the internet. They also spent a lot of time in the waiting room watching whatever was on the television (daytime shows) and spent no time looking at the paper materials. We wanted to create a informational source that was accurate and was easily accessible and understandable for the teens that visited the clinic. With knowledge, the teens could be empowered to make informed choices in regards to sexual health.
Safety Attitudes Survey

Assessing the Patient Safety Culture in the ICU setting at a large teaching hospital.

By: CHAITANYA CHURI

This project involved assessing the Patient Safety Culture in the ICUs of Memorial Hermann Hospital in Houston, TX.

Patient Safety is an important consideration of those public health professionals who specialize in healthcare management.

Towards this goal, the staff of the Medical and Transplant Surgical ICUs were administered a safety attitudes questionnaire that has been designed to assess attitudes towards patient safety. These results will form a baseline against which any future interventions in patient safety will be assessed.

My job here was actually administering the surveys, data analysis and interpretation. A second phase of this study will reexamine these attitudes after implementing interventions.

Public Health Significance

This project was designed to address two essential services of Public Health.

1. To Diagnose and Investigate the nature of safety attitudes in the provider community.

2. To Develop Policies and Plans based on the investigation, that would help the organization improve the quality and safety of the care that they provide.

Since Memorial Hermann is one of the largest hospital systems in the city, it is essential to ensure that the quality of healthcare delivered is high. Further, patient safety should be the highest priority for any healthcare organization.

As part of the healthcare delivery system in the city, Memorial Hermann contributes to public health by managing a large volume of Houston’s disease burden. The project was designed to improve the quality of this care.

Special events/duties

- Conducting surveys for staff in the ICUs. I had to ensure that all staff shifts were covered.

- Detailed statistical documentation of the survey results.

Lessons Learned

- The staff of the ICUs is extremely busy. To ensure everyone’s participation, one needs to be extremely patient.

Representational picture of an ICU staff station, the setting of this study.

Adolescent Dating Violence

Breaking the cycle of teen dating violence (TDV)

By: Sam Darko

Intro
Unhealthy relationships can start early and last a lifetime. TDV is defined as the physical, sexual, or psychological/emotional violence within a dating relationship, as well as stalking.¹

What?
My internship was about interacting with teens to get a better insight into the causes of violence and abuse in young relationships.

Who?
I worked with Dr. Jeff Temple – Director of Behavioral Health, at the UT Medical Branch, Galveston.

Why?
There is a general lack of awareness about teen dating violence in Texas.

When?
January 7 – April 30.

How?
Through surveys, educational materials, and counseling teens regarding the dangers of violence in dating.

Duties
Data analysis, counseling teens, mentoring of affected victims of teen dating violence.

Approach
UTMB is using a multifaceted approach to combat the issue of TDV in Texas via research, educating the youth and counseling of victims.

Final product
Educational pamphlets, potential peer reviewed publication.

Why is teen dating violence a Public Health problem?

Some Statistics

• A survey among adult victims of rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner showed that 22.4% of women and 15.0% of men first experienced some form of partner violence between 11 and 17 years of age.¹

• About 9% of high school students report being hit, slapped, or physically injured intentionally by a boyfriend or girlfriend in the 12 months before surveyed.²

Public Health Essential Service(s) (PHES)

• The PHES that most closely relate to my experience are Monitoring, Research, Mobilizing, and Informing, Educating, & Empowering.

Contributions to Public Health

• Educating teens and raising their awareness about what constitutes TDV was important for me because having the knowledge of what TDV is the first solution to curbing this menace.

• Getting a federal grant to research into TDV is a huge step by UTMB towards preventing abusive teenage relationships. Such a bold step will go a long way to reduce the rate of TDV in Texas.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

“Pearls of Wisdom”

• When looking for a practicum, start early, be proactive and make the initiative to contact potential preceptors.

• When dealing with human subjects during surveys, respect their wishes and privacy (do not try to convince anyone for consent).

References:


Racial and Ethnic Diversity within the Affordable Care Act

By: Umber Dickerson

The Texas Health Institute is working to analyze the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) and is collaborating with the Kellogg Institute to create reports that focus on diversity. Our research involved examining the many states who are receiving funding through grants from the ACA that will help in the creation of government programs to serve diverse communities. THI is also following the committees created through health reform that are working to improve the health of diverse communities. Through the research conducted by the Kellogg Institute, policy is broken down to a more granular level that can be more easily understood to the general public and weaknesses in policies can be better identified for additional policy development in the future.

Public Health Significance

Through the evaluation of public policy, the flaws and weaknesses of the Affordable Care Act become more evident and future policy can be written to fill in the gaps and improve upon existing policy. By researching policy and providing information to the public, The Texas Health Institute is fulfilling their role as public health practitioners through the ethical principal of “advocacy and work for the empowerment of the disenfranchised community members.”

Lessons Learned:

- I learned how health care reform addresses diversity and what communities will be affected by the PPACA.
- I have also learned that many gaps regarding diversity exist within health care reform that has not been addressed and more can be done to improve the health care of diverse communities.

Population by Race and Ethnicity, Actual and Projected, 1960, 2011 and 2050

Projection of Races in the US 2050 (not all races shown)

Public Health Significance

The essential services of public health are considered daily when choosing and planning the departments that will be available in the new hospital for patients.

Developing policies and plans is essential in creating a foundation for the hospital’s operational process. They are anticipated to allow the hospital to transition from planning and implementation to performing the ongoing operations and oversight of an accredited hospital.

Specifically, while working on creating these policies and procedures for each department, it was vital to meet with key stakeholders in order to ensure the safety of the patients and execute the highest quality of care.

Overall, Baylor College of Medicine exhibits the 10 essential public health services daily as it progresses toward a fully operational hospital. The working team as a whole demonstrates great rigor and discipline with a common goal of transforming the health care of today.

Health From The Ground Up

By: Jessica El-Hallal

Being a part of such a unique project as opening a hospital is a rare opportunity. From the process of licensure and accreditation to operational planning, I got to see a glimpse of the route towards the completion of a hospital. All the operational plans for the Baylor College of Medicine Medical Center hospital incorporate a variety of approaches that anticipate and respect diverse values, beliefs, and cultures of the community.

One of my major projects has been working on the interior hospital signage for the new Baylor College of Medicine Medical Center. This project required me to communicate with several department administrators and key clinical leadership. Accordingly, this has allowed me to exhibit cultural competency among stakeholders for each department and manage the dynamics of differences that I was exposed to.

Taking Health to the Next Level

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Advice for Future Students

• There are so many successful and inspiring people who work at every organization. Try to meet as many of them as possible!
Implementing Quality Improvement (QI) measures at a FQHC

Practicum Highlights

- Review of the data revealed a huge gap in utilization of dental services by medical clinic patients (aged ≤ 18 years) with figures being as low as 5%
- Implemented a cross-referral system to improve medical-dental integration of services.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

Choose your practicum wisely, and preferably one that would further your interests and goals because that’s what I did and it made my experience all the more enjoyable and provided me with a wonderful foundation to build upon.

Quality Improvement Internship

By: Aparna Ingleshwar

I worked for the Denver Harbor Dental Clinic which, together with its adjoining medical clinic, constitutes a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC).

My project involved implementing QI measures at the dental clinic with the main focus being to increase patient utilization of services and improve integration of the medical and dental services at the FQHC, in order to build a more comprehensive model of care for the patient.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience related to the Essential Services of public health in the following areas:

- Diagnose and investigate health problems and health hazards in the community.
- Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues.
- Mobilize community partnerships to identify and solve health problems.
- Link people to needed personal health services and assure the provision of health care when otherwise unavailable.

The Denver Harbor Dental Clinic, being a FQHC provides essential dental care services to the underserved communities of Northeast Houston. Their “WOW” program that offers free dental counseling and prophylactic services to pregnant women has proven to be a successful example of creating community partnerships that not only build trust and sustainability within the community but also improve the health of the community.
Cancer Symptoms and Public Health

**Practicum Highlights**
- Clinic visits and working with cancer patients
- Training in clinical research and Informed Consent
- Contributing to the "real" work being done in research
- Understanding the role of cancer symptoms on the community

**Advice for Future Practicum Students**
- Clarify the details of your practicum roles and responsibilities as soon as you can. Get the details spelled out.
- Make your practicum work for your educational goals; do not rely on the preceptor to do it for you.
- Look for new projects and activities you might be able to participate in.
- Stay out of the office politics and just focus on

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**Why Symptom Management is Important: Treatment Kills Patients More Than Cancer**

The University of Texas, M D Anderson Cancer Center is the leading center for cancer treatment in the world.

Working to not only treat cancer, but understand all of the side effects of cancer treatment and survival is an important role for the M D Anderson to play as the leader in the community.

My responsibilities included:
- Learning about Cancer Symptom Science

**Public Health Significance**

The Cancer Symptom Research Department contributes to public health through the following:

- Diagnose and investigate health problems and health hazards in the community.
- Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues.
- Mobilize community partnerships to identify and solve health problems.
- Evaluate effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services.
- Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems.

**Advice for Future Practicum Students**

- Working with patients to gain Informed Consent for clinical trials
- Tracking patients in clinical trial performance

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Most people die from the effects of cancer treatment, than the cancer itself.

With 1.6 mm new cases of cancer this year and increasing rates and duration of cancer survival, treating the symptoms of the treatments for cancer are more important than ever.

"Surviving" cancer often means living with chronic effects of survival.

Image Source: Cancer Symptom Science, C. Cleeland, 2012

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Image Source: Cancer Symptom Science, C. Cleeland, 2012
EMERGENCY MEDICINE RESEARCH

Practicum Highlights

- Applied transdisciplinary approach of evidence based practice to procure measures for reducing patient wait times
- Literature reviews
- Focus group survey
- Develop survey questionnaires
- Voice of patient brainstorming
- Conference meetings, planning and decision makings
- Thesis proposal discussed with team, timely and appealing

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Plan ahead and pursue your interests, then you will find your practicum educative and fun filled.
- Be attentive to every detail in the class, it will surely be useful in your practicum and future public health projects.
- Seek for help and advice as needed from your preceptors and team members; don’t wait till you make avoidable mistakes.

Improving patient flow and resource utilization at an ED

By: Debola Ola

The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston School of Medicine in collaboration with the Cockrell School of Engineering at the University of Texas Austin is currently working on a 3 year project to improve patient flow and resource utilization at the Emergency department (ED). The operational plan was based on the Six Sigma DMAIC (Define, Measures, Analyze, Improve and Control) methodology approach and lean techniques.

They set up various teams and sub teams including doctors, nurses, researchers and engineers. I was involved in the voice of patient brainstorming team. The practicum afforded me the opportunity to put into practice what I learnt in class. It was closely related to my major degree of study in Health Services Research. I had the opportunity of using a patient flow chart to map out the check in and triage process at LBJ ED and I am a principal investigator of a proposed project aimed at improving access to care at LBJ Emergency department. I hope to continue with the team in the ongoing project till completion.

Public Health Significance

This topic is very important because it addresses issues on access to care and health care fragmentation. My practicum experience with the LBJ ED project covers the essential of Public Health Services. Specifically the hospital mobilized community partnerships to identify and solve public health problems, evaluate the effectiveness, accessibility and quality of personal and population based health services and research for new insights and innovative solutions. On the long run, the entire project covers all the ten essentials of public health.

The host organization contributes to public health through the ongoing LBJ project aimed at reducing patient wait times, improving access to care and achieving quality care at the ED. The practicum afforded me the opportunity to assess the public health impact of ER and primary care services on access to care and quality improvement.

My final product is a thesis proposal on the assessment of ESI level 3-5 patients who has regular PCP or usual place of care but visit the ED instead; a sub analysis of the ongoing project.
Why is teen dating violence a 
Public Health problem?

Snapshot

- In 9 out of 10 rapes in which the offender is under 18, so is the victim.²
- 39% of female high school students report that students talk in school about whether someone is attempting to control the person they are dating.²
- Patterns of dating violence behavior often start early and carry through into adult relationships.¹

Public Health Essential Service(s) (PHES)

- The PHES that most closely relate to my practicum experience are Research, Mobilizing, Monitoring and Informing, Educating, & Empowering.

Contributions to Public Health

- Mentoring the teens and educating them to eschew violence in their relationships meant a lot to me because I served as a good role model who empowered them to make the right decisions and lifestyle changes.
- The fact that UTMB provides support for abused victims of teenage dating violence speaks volumes about their determination to reduce the rate of teen dating violence in Texas. Due to this initiative, many teens are opening up to report about abusive relationships, leading to more meaningful research about the truth behind violence in dating.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Get a practicum you are truly interested in when searching for one.
- Be diligent to make meaningful connections during your practicum; those contacts might come in handy later!
Healthcare for the Homeless

Students Providing Healthcare to the Houston Homeless

By: PRASANTH PATTISAPU

At HOMES, the stated mission was delivering healthcare to the homeless like any other clinic (taking histories, refilling prescriptions, etc.). But since most patients who come to HOMES are transiently homeless, often passing through Houston, the real goal is to connect each patient to the appropriate resources. As healthcare providers, our role was more of individual patient advocacy than of clinical therapy.

I led a team of medical and pharmacy students to take a patient’s story, tracing the problems to their systemic origins, and splitting up the work of connecting the patient to the resources needed.

Four times a year, the main volunteers would meet to discuss new strategies, organizations, and resources available to our patients.

Lessons Learned

• Working with the homeless is a skill. It takes many years of work, and the field changes daily. You have to explore the resources that your clients will use, know their ins and outs, and know what other homeless clients think about it.

Activities

• Helped dozens of patients get gold cards, disability, identification, or other assistance.
• Taught a lecture on respite and post-discharge care for homeless patients to a class of medical students.

Public Health Significance

Since the homeless in any city are a poorly documented and difficult to study population, the difference between population-level and individual-level interventions is blurred.

Monitoring and diagnosing/investigating the health problems and their underlying sources is often best done at the individual level. For example, we learned how violence and depression are connected when interviewing a depressed and suicidal patient who needed to keep weapons (knives) nearby to protect against being mugged or attacked.

To the degree possible, this is also where education and empowerment occurred, since educational resources aimed at the whole public do not often reach all homeless (every homeless person is different and uses different resources). We counseled on tobacco and substance abuse, shared street survival strategies provided by other patients, and connected patients to the resources they needed.
HIV Linkage to Care

Practicum Highlights

• Refining my efficiency in research to compile data into a usable format
• Heightened awareness of the resources that are already available
• “Think Globally, Act Locally”

Navigating the Maze of Eligibility Determinations for HIV+ Individuals

By: Linda Pham

During my practicum, I conducted research into the available resources for PLWHA (People Living With HIV/AIDS) in the Houston area.

Different service providers have different requirements for financial assistance programs for low-income individuals to access care.

By organizing the eligibility requirements in a comprehensive document, my deliverable will streamline the process of linkage to care and continuation of care for PLWHA who are underinsured or uninsured.

My host organization (Baylor International Pediatric AIDS Initiative) has a vision (A healthy and fulfilled life for every HIV infected or affected child and his family) that they strive toward on a global scale. My project is on a local scale and more limited in scope: access to resources for PLWHA in Houston.

Public Health Significance

Houston has a high prevalence of HIV: twice the national average.

In 2008, there were 44 new infections for every 100,000 in Harris County compared with 23 per 100,000 nationwide.


As pertains to APHA Essential Public Health Services:

#7 - Link people to needed personal health services and assure the provision of health care when otherwise unavailable.

One important concept I have learned is that having resources available is only the first step on the pathway of access to care. Those resources must also be accessible and known to the population it was intended to help in order to truly be effective.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

• It’s ok to admit your knowledge is limited, that you have more interests you want to look into than you have time to do so. It’s ok if you don’t know all there is to know (yet). But most of all, don’t forget to stop and smell the roses! Don’t be afraid to slow down to learn, because that will pay off in the long run.
SHAPE UP HOUSTON.

Practicum Highlights

- Conducting Anthropometric measurements of the participants as a measure of post intervention health outcome.
- Encouraging previous year's participants to come for follow up measurements.

Lessons Learned

- As a field data collector, I gained invaluable experience in Data Collection.

Fighting Obesity One Step at a Time.

By: Manasi S. Suryavanshi

Shape Up Houston is a momentous project initiated by Lan Bentsen to fight obesity by improvements in lifestyle through better food, exercise and nutrition.

I am involved with one of the several programs under this initiative that aims at obesity awareness among employees at five major hospitals in Texas Medical Center.

First phase of this study was completed previous year and it conducted baseline anthropometric and blood measurements of the participants. Each institution then implemented its own wellness and education efforts along with Shape Up strategies involving all participants.

I am involved in the second phase of the study and my primary duty is conducting follow up measurements of the participants.

Public Health Significance

Shape Up Houston is involved in many of the Essential Public Health Services. The main purpose of this initiative is to inform and educate people about the obesity epidemic and the health complication arising from it. It also empowers people with techniques to manage their obesity like campaigns encouraging healthy food choices.

Researchers at Shape Up Houston have developed many innovative solutions to tackle the obesity problem such as the "no fry days" to encourage people avoid fried food at least once a week and "rethink your drink" campaign to help participants choose beverages with less sugar and fewer calories.

 SHAPE UP HOUSTON LOGO
(c) Copyright 2012 Shape Up Houston
Life as a Texas Legislature Newbie.

By: Amber Weed

My practicum experience took place at the Texas State Capitol in Austin, TX. I was an intern in the Texas Legislative Internship Program. This internship program is sponsored by Texas Senator Rodney Ellis from Houston. The internship offered the opportunity to students from all over the world to work around the Capitol. I worked as a health policy analyst for Senator Ellis. I worked with the policy advisor in Senator Ellis’ office to handle all of the health care issues of the current legislative session.

I analyzed and researched health care bills and policies. I wrote memos about bills and was able to offer my opinion to the Senator. In addition to working as a health policy analyst, I was also chosen to be the Committee clerk for the Senate Committee on Open Government. I was responsible for preparing the committee on each upcoming meeting and ensuring that the committee meetings met all the Senate’s requirements. I learned firsthand the legislative process of how bills become law in Texas.

Public Health Significance

The practicum at the Texas State Capitol exemplified multiple examples of the essentials to public health. The practicum experience at the Capitol is the highest level of policy making for the state of Texas. The policies passed will be implemented throughout the state. The next essential of public health that was significant during my practicum was research.

Research of public health solutions was a major component at the Capitol during this legislative session. There were many hot button health care topics being debated at the Capitol such as Medicaid expansion, Health Insurance Exchange and implementation of the ACA. All of the members and advocacy groups researched the pros and cons of these health care issues.
Working on accreditation and licensure of a new hospital

By: Charla Wright

I started my internships with Baylor College of Medicine in January and finished at the end of March. My boss was the Project Lead of the McNair Project, which centered on opening the new hospital. I was placed in charge of developing policies and procedures that would allow BCM to become accredited with the Joint Commission. To do this, I was required to research the standards needed and how BCM wanted their policies formulated.

The policies and procedures were sent to the legal department for clarification and edits. In addition to creating policies and procedures, I created timelines to keep staff on track to BCM’s opening date. These timelines included deadlines for accreditation and licensure, construction, and inspections.

Public Health Significance

I believe working on accreditation and licensure at BCM is significant to public health in many ways. First, an essential public health service is to develop policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts. The policies that I developed will provide a guide for practitioners to deliver quality care and safety. The second essential public health service that was significant in my internship was enforcing laws and regulations to protect health and safety. When creating the policies and procedures, I was required to follow the Joint Commission standards. These standards make sure that an individual’s health and safety is protected.

The final essential public health service used in my internship was assuring a competent public health and personal healthcare workforce. Many of the policies and procedures I created were geared towards making sure that the personnel and practitioners were acting in the best interest of their patients and being prepared for every type of medical situation.

Practicum Highlights

- Created BCM policies and procedures based on JC Standards
- Participated in laboratory formulation
- Developed accreditation and licensure schedule

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Go into the practicum with a specific set of goals or objectives
- Research BCM and its future plans
- Find a subject that you enjoy and pursue it
- Ask for additional work or attempt to specialize in a subject
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/