Public Health Practice

Stories from the Field

The University of Texas School of Public Health
Student Practicum Experiences
Spring 2013 – 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 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

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<th>Servings per e-Magazine: 23</th>
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### Austin Regional Campus

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### Dallas Regional Campus

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### El Paso Regional Campus

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### San Antonio Regional Campus

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<td>HIV/AIDS and Heart Health</td>
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<td>Border Health</td>
<td>Lisa Beckner</td>
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<td>Border Health</td>
<td>Dana Brown</td>
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<td>Robert Martinez</td>
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Child Health Research Forum

Practicum Highlights

- The opportunity to interview public health experts
- Actively learned about the characteristics that made the honoree an effective leader in the field of public health
- Helped organize with the Center’s largest community event
- Networked with prominent researchers in child health and learned about their current research topics, such as teen texting and driving, adolescent tobacco use, obesity prevention and intervention mapping

The Michael & Susan Dell Lectureship in Child Health

By: CASSANDRA ENYEART

My practicum was with the 7th Annual Michael & Susan Dell Lectureship in Child Health. The annual Lectureship serves as a research forum for child health experts. I assisted with organizing and carrying out tasks leading up the Lectureship and during the Lectureship event.

Some of my responsibilities were assisting in conducting interviews with colleagues of the honoree, developing an event evaluation for participants, entering the feedback into a program that was used to assess the responses and creating an Event Report.

The Event Report presented a summary of the event, an overview of the responses and corresponding charts and assessment of the successes and areas for improvement for the following year.

Public Health Significance

The Lectureship serves to inform, educate and empower the community about child health. The Lectureship allows prominent researchers to acknowledge for their research efforts and accomplishments. It also allows researchers in child health to present their research topics to the public.

The Lectureship also mobilizes community partnerships because the researchers presenting often collaborate with other community organizations that reach out to them after the event.
Clinical Research

By: Taylor Yardley

Hospital Physicians in Clinical Research is the research arm of a large multi-specialty physician group with a focus on emergency and critical care. Staffed with experienced physician investigators, coordinators and technicians, HPCR is poised to carry out virtually any study in the emergency department, ICU or clinic setting.

Hospital Physicians in Clinical Research currently works with the Seton Family of Hospitals to perform clinical research studies. I was able to assist with research at University Medical Center Brackenridge. There were several projects that I was able to assist the research team with, such as the development, design, implementation, collection, and analysis of research studies.

I chose to assist with studies relating to infectious disease. I was able to help write a protocol, enter and analyze data, and consent patients.

Practicum Highlights

- Gaining experience in Public Health
- Being a part of ground breaking research

Public Health Significance

Investigation of emergency medicine has potential in shaping the health of populations rather than simply responding to the disease states of individual patients.

Together emergency medicine research and public health can help find solutions to problems such as care for the homeless and disadvantaged, disease prevention and health promotion, injury prevention, and racial and ethnic disparities to name a few.

Compared with most medical specialties, emergency medicine bridges biomedical and public health approaches for preventing disease and injury and promoting health through population based strategies targeted at the community.

The ED also collects data used for surveillance of infectious diseases and environmental emergencies and forwards patient-level data to public health departments.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

This is a great opportunity to see what a job would be like in this field. I never really understood what all clinical research encompassed until this practicum experience.
Dental Unit Water Line Contamination

Dental treatments with undesirable side effects

By: Shurouk Azzo

Over the last 4 decades, studies have shown that Dental Unit Waterlines are very suitable environment for microbes to live and grow. The DUWLs are becoming heavily contaminated with many forms of organisms that may cause harm to both patients and dental office workers.

I am conducting my practicum at Baylor College of Dentistry in Dallas, where I have been reviewing those studies to develop an instrument containing all the data collected. The final product should be a systematic review finalizing whether there is adequate evidence that waterline contamination can lead to morbidity and mortality, and whether infection control measures are warranted.

Public Health Significance:

As the biofilm develops and grows, endotoxins are released through the water and most of the dental instruments. Patients and dental health staff can become exposed to those toxins and may get infected. The Public Health services that can be implemented to help contain this problem are:

1- To diagnose and investigate the health problem and its hazard in the community.
2- To inform, educate, and empower people about this serious health problem.
3- And, to research for new insights and innovative solutions to this dental health problem.

Research should continue to find the most improved and effective methods to disinfect and decontaminate the DUWLs.

During my practicum, I became familiar with the water safety regulations and rules made for dental offices. Those regulations were made by public health agencies like; CDC, ADA, OSAP, and APHA.

I also had to review and analyze many literatures addressing the contamination of Dental Unit Waterlines issue.

“Implementing and monitoring effective infection control protocols for cleaning and maintaining DUWLs are very important and vital in the matter of life and death”
My practicum experience involved serving on a research team on two studies examining smoking cessation and factors contributing to healthy diet and physical activity choices. Faculty at the School of Public Health, Dallas Regional Campus - Dr. Darla Kendzor and Dr. Michael Businelle - led the team and designed the studies.

I screened potential participants for eligibility and collected data in person and via computerized questionnaires.

My final project included conducting bivariate correlation analysis on preliminary study data. Results are still pending due to outstanding data collection.

**Public Health Significance**

My practicum experience directly served to fulfill the following Public Health Essential Services:

“Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems.”

In one study, the research team with which I worked collected data from research participants on smartphones to determine whether any correlations existed between cognitive and situational characteristics of participants and their urges to smoke. The study also examined any potential correlations with likelihood of quitting smoking. Participants were required to answer short questionnaires on the phones several times throughout the day for two weeks.

This study made innovative use of technology to collect data from a population of individuals whose health would could be greatly improved by discovering ways to more easily quit smoking.
Let's move and fight Obesity

By: Fathim Kamagate

My Practicum was at the YMCA of Dallas. The program that I work for is called Salsa Sabor y Salud. The program was geared toward Hispanics and their children who were at risk of being obese or obese. I was responsible to conduct a need assessment to evaluate the needs of the target population and see what need to be done to make the program better. During the program, there were health education on healthy eating (portion control, healthy snacks, eating from the five food groups) and the importance of daily physical activity. At the end of each day, participant does 10 min physical activity with their children and healthy snack is distributed.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience was based on inform, educate, and empower people about obesity. Health education classes were delivered to teach about healthy lifestyle (healthy eating and physical activity). Portion control was demonstrated to participants. Participants did a lot of hands on activities like putting healthy plate together with appropriate portion size, choosing a healthy snacks, and appropriate exercise to do during daily break.

Special events/ duties/highlights during your practicum

- Teach appropriate healthy eating habit with demonstration or portion control
- Do a 10 min physical activity with participants

Lessons Learned [OR] Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Having an impact on someone life is very challenging. You need to be dedicated and reliable


Exposure Assessment in E-Waste Recyclers

By-Preetha Kandaswamy

Electronic wastes (e-wastes) are generated in high volumes worldwide, about 20 to 50 million metric tons per year. Common e-wastes are cell phones, televisions, computers, and refrigerators. We at the Department of EOHS, UTSPH conducted a pilot bio monitoring study of women working as home-based electronic waste recyclers in rural Vietnam.

The purpose of this study was to measure and demonstrate elevated levels of BFRs (Brominated Flame Retardants) and other compounds from e-waste which can affect health and to recommend remedies for decreasing such exposure. The study focused on 10 women home based workers and 10 matched comparisons. The results indicate that the workers had elevated levels of PBDEs, metals and dioxin like compounds when compared with controls. Long term exposure to these contaminants has the potential to negatively influence the long term health among recycling workers.

Public Health Significance

Pregnant women and children living in proximity to e-waste sites are potentially at risk for disruptions in fetal and neurodevelopment. Levels of PBDEs have been detected at higher levels in the breast milk of Vietnamese women who live in e-waste dismantling sites. We were able to - Diagnose and Investigate health problems and occupational health hazards in the community.

We were also involved in informing, educating and empowering people, that improved working conditions for e-waste recyclers can lower their levels of toxic chemicals. Hence policies and plans can be developed to ensure workforce safety.

The research team at the Department of EOHS-UTSPH Dallas is completely involved in research of new insights and innovative solutions to health problems, resulting from exposure to toxic chemicals.

This exposure assessment is one of the first to report bio monitoring of toxic chemicals found in e-waste recycling and this research greatly contributes to the field of Public Health.
Public Health Significance

The work of Dr. Chung and her investigative team routinely serve various essential public health services. Through routine communications with media, healthcare providers, and other stakeholders, the team seeks to inform and educate members of the community and to help mobilize community partnerships to address health issues. At the core of the team’s public health mission, however, is the ongoing investigation into when, where, and how diseases occur within the community. As I learned from both my data abstraction and analysis activities, these fundamental epidemiological questions require both consistent tracking of reported data, as well as the creative use of a variety of risk measures computed from the same data. Effective monitoring and risk assessment are therefore particularly important public health services fulfilled by Dr. Chung’s team and are the key to mitigation efforts against West Nile virus and other emerging community health threats.

Infectious Disease Reporting and Surveillance in Dallas County

By: Gene Lee

This spring, I have had the opportunity to observe and work with the Dallas County Health and Human Services Department epidemiological investigation team, lead by Dr. Wendy Chung. The primary objectives of the investigative team include ascertainment and assessment of disease incidence, distribution, and community-wide risk factors. My direct involvement primarily focused on reporting and surveillance for seasonal influenza and West Nile virus. Some specific activities included medical data abstracting and the compiling and analysis of mosquito vector data to identify areas of particular risk. I also assisted with follow-up contact with individuals who had been affected by the previous season’s West Nile outbreak. Findings from the team’s epidemiological findings will be presented at a future scientific conference.

Special Highlights of my Experience

- Attended various research presentations by Dr. Chung and other faculty
- Observed collaborative investigations between Dallas County Health and Human Services and the Center for Disease Control

Advice for Future Students

- Take every opportunity to listen to meetings and presentations by public health practitioners and other scientists. To learn about the thought processes of more advanced professionals is an extremely valuable opportunity.


TX counties affected by West Nile Virus (2012)
Source: TX Dept of State Health Services
Available: http://www.dshs.state.tx.us,IDCU/disease/arboviral/we
stine/maps/texas/2012/
Pediatric Emergency Medicine Research

Pediatric Emergency Medicine Research: Finding better ways to provide Emergency Care for young patients.

By: Ashley Negaard

My goal for my practicum was to design and conduct a clinical research project with the focus on helping to create better emergency care for pediatric patients.

For this project, my duties were to design a study, write a protocol, apply for IRB approval, review 4000+ medical records, and analyze the findings for the purpose of publication.

The primary objective of this study is to identify clinical conditions pediatric patients are transferred from an outside Emergency Department (ED) to our ED and identify which conditions could be targeted by future intervention in order to reduce unnecessary transfers.

Currently, we are still in the data collection step and do not have any findings to present. It is interesting to note that I have been able to identify many transferred patients who obviously could have been managed at the sending ED.

Public Health Significance

This practicum covered the public health service of Research.

Research in the Emergency Department is unique as most clinical conditions can be studied and enrollment can be done 24/7.

The goal of most emergency medicine research is to find a better way to provide patient care through more efficient treatment, quicker diagnosis, and improved management policy.

In the CMC ED, a variety of research projects are currently being conducted. Studies on asthma management, patient-family education, improved diagnostic testing for appendicitis, pre-hospital patient care, patient-family center care, and injury prevention are currently being done.

The ability to have access to a variety of clinical conditions and a large patient volume makes the emergency department a prime environment for clinical and public health research with the goal to improve patient care.

Points of Advice

- Start planning your practicum 4-6 months in advance
- If you want to design and conduct a study, start at least 8 months in advance
- Emergency Medicine research requires a flexible schedule and willingness to work nights and/or weekends, but it is energy filled and exciting!
Pediatric Emergency Medicine Research

Practicum Highlight

- Engaged with members of the community
- Developed cultural competency skills
- Investigated methods to improve quality of care
- Contributed to the evaluation of current health services

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Be open and flexible with practicum opportunities. I had the fortune of finding a practicum sponsor who was passionate about her work. Her passion inspired me to approach this opportunity with an open mind. Initially I came into the experience with a specific agenda. I quickly realized that releasing this agenda was necessary. It provided me with an opportunity to learn a new set of skills that I would have otherwise not been exposed to.

Research: the stethoscope for populations

By: Lauren M. Weil

Pediatric Emergency Room Researchers at Children’s Medical Center of Dallas are conducting studies that aim to find new insights into improving emergency medicine. One particular study’s objective is to identify biomarkers to quickly rule out appendicitis. Children, 2-18 years of age, with suspected appendicitis are enrolled in the clinical research study.

As one of the researchers on this study my duties included enrolling patients. The following steps were conducted to accomplish enrollment:

- Identifying eligible patients who met the studies inclusion criteria
- Working with doctors to confirm eligibility
- Obtaining patient’s consent
- Working with nurses to collect blood samples

The study is ongoing therefore no results have been reported at this time.

Public Health Significance

This research to investigate and diagnose appendicitis is the Essential Public Health Service provided to the community. Ultimately, insights from this study can drive changes in treatment, which improve quality of life and create dollar savings for the community. Appendicitis is often difficult to diagnose because patients present differently. The result of a misdiagnosed appendicitis can lead to systemic infections. Having a quick blood test with a high specificity will help in the diagnosis of acute appendicitis.

The Emergency Medicine Research Department at Children’s Medical Center conducts research to improve emergency diagnostic and treatments procedures.

Accurate diagnostic tests that are specific negative biomarkers for a suspected appendicitis result in the prevention of unnecessary radiation exposure from a CT scan.

A quick test also reduces the amount of resources used in the Emergency Room, saving time and money.
Community Health Advocacy
By Timothy Bullock

Training in Community Health Advocacy at the US/Mexico Border

As a medical student at Texas Tech University Paul L. Foster School of Medicine, I am enrolled in a course called “Society, Community, and the Individual” (SCI). This course immerses students into the El Paso and surrounding communities from the first day of medical school. It provides foundational instruction in behavioral sciences, epidemiology, statistics, alternative medicine and community advocacy, equipping us to understand public health concepts. This experience supplemented my MPH instruction very well. Conducting a community assessment and gaining exposure to community needs encouraged me to pursue partnerships and continued service within an organization serving domestic violence victims.

Primarily, I shadowed my practicum preceptor, family medicine physician Rebecca Campos, MD, at the Texas Tech Socorro clinic, where community public health issues are necessarily integrated with medical care.

Public Health Significance

The public health instruction, shadowing, and community assessment of Socorro, addressed the public health essential service of “Diagnosing and investigating health problems and health hazards in the community.”

I met the essential service, “Informing, educating, and empowering people about health issues,” through ensuing service in the community. Motivated by a presentation in our SCI course on domestic violence, provided by the director of the El Paso Center Against Family Violence (CAFV), I initiated sharing information first with CAFV staff (a presentation on the effects of chronic stress and how to intervene). This opened the door to address women’s health issues with clients in sexual assault and self-care support/therapy groups, which I engaged in alongside classmates Uejin Kim and Nathan Yee. Upon the realization of access to care disparities, we also began to educate on accessing free or reduced-cost primary & surgical care.

Exposure to such organizations though my instruction helped me see needs and encouraged me to get involved.

Highlights

- Shadowed promotoras at a community clinic servicing remote colonias.
- Practiced pre-natal visit care with a nurse midwife at a reduced-cost health clinic.
- Shadowed nurses at El Paso Dept of Public Health in assessing & treating STDs & TB.
- Went on-site with social worker in assessing Adult Protective Services cases.

Lessons Learned

- Becoming involved in service learning while completing the SCI course fostered understanding of real people’s needs, a sense of empathy, and allowed for application and sharing of knowledge to those who could practically benefit.

Source: Joanne Bates, MPA, MPH. April 2013.

Public Health Significance

During my practicum I could see how most of the essential public health services were implemented in the Tobacco prevention program. The Public Health essential Services that were most directly involved were Monitoring, Informing, Educating, and Empowering, to develop policies and plans, Enforce, and Evaluate.

This program will have a great impact on the future generations. We can see that it works and less people are smoking in public places.

I ♥ EL PASO

Congratulations on over 10 years of cleaner air, clearer lungs, and a healthier city. The smoke-free policy did not affect restaurant and bar revenue.

Tobacco Prevention in El Paso

My practicum site was with the El Paso Department of Public Health. I had the opportunity to work in the Tobacco Prevention Program among youth. I gained knowledge and experience in working to prevent smoking in the El Paso area. This program has made an impact in the community especially among youth. The smoke free policy has been effective in public places such as work places, schools, day cares, hospitals & restaurants.

By: Eduardo Davila

This educational program was an important part of my practicum. The benefits of the Public Health Essential Service in the community are evident. I assisted in the preparation of the Grant proposal for Tobacco Prevention among Youth, which finally was approved on April, 8, 2013.

Advice for Future Students

- Your Practicum can be the best training experience that you can have.
- You will be surprise to know that agencies and organizations are waiting for someone like you.
- Always have a positive attitude and open mind.

Texas Tobacco Free Kids Day

- El Paso Kick Butts Day – March 23, 2013 at Gary del Palacio Recreation Center - in support of national efforts to prevent youth from using tobacco products

Spring 2013 • Eduardo Davila • El Paso Department of Public Health • Tobacco Prevention
**Public Health Significance**

This practicum experience is related to several of the Essential Services of Public Health. First, the climate assessment provides new insight into institutional diversity. This research will help leaders at PLFSOM to address barriers and to make policies and plans that facilitate diversity.

A diverse institutional climate is important for creating partnerships and identifying and solving health problems.

As a graduate research assistant with the Office of Diversity Affairs, I facilitated a research study to assess the institutional diversity climate at PLFSOM. We conducted interviews and focus groups with faculty, residents, students and staff and analyzed responses using qualitative methods. The results of this study will be used by PLFSOM to address needs and gaps in policies and practices relevant to diversity.

**Cultural Competence**

- In collaboration with the Office of Continuing Medical Education and Las Palmas Del Sol Healthcare, The Office of Diversity Affairs held its 2nd annual Cultural Competence Seminar on April 12, 2013.

**Lessons Learned**

- Diversity is enhanced by engagement with the community. Building partnerships and collaboration among different stakeholders is essential to identifying public health interests.

By: ALEXANDRA TODD

The Office of Diversity Affairs at Paul L. Foster School of Medicine (PLFSOM) in El Paso promotes an institutional climate that is supportive of diversity among students, residents, faculty and staff. The Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) requires that institutions that offer a medical education program implement policies and practices that achieve diversity.

Institutional Diversity Climate Assessment

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Community Education and Empowerment

Practicum Highlights

- Teaching enthusiastic, young parents about healthy nutrition and lifestyle options for their children.

- Being able to provide people throughout the community with important information and resources available to them.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Do not underestimate the innovation and resilience of children who may be in a difficult situation. They are often able to take the ups and downs of life and still look forward to the future with enthusiasm and humor.

Teenage Enthusiasm

By: Mariam Weekes

I spent the semester interning at the Child Crisis Center of El Paso. While I helped out in any capacity I was able to, I spent most of the semester working on two separate projects.

First, I researched, developed, and taught a multi-session nutrition class for teenage parents. This was both challenging and rewarding, in that nutrition was not my area of study, but I learned quite a bit through researching, and was excited to see how engaged and enthusiastic the teens were.

Secondly, I worked on putting together a detailed log of all the case files from the past year, so as to help the administration better evaluate what areas of information need to be more closely audited or improved on.

Public Health Significance

Through the nutrition class I taught to teen parents, I was involved with educating the students on the necessity of a healthy lifestyle for themselves and their children, and empowering them to make healthy and knowledgeable choices.

Through attending so many health fairs in the area, I was involved with linking individuals and the community to important services for them and their families.

In other areas, the Child Crisis Center of El Paso provides a safe place for children who are either at risk of being abused, or whose families are in an immediate crisis situation. They also work hard to disseminate information throughout the community about services either directly available through their center, or available through other partner organizations in the area.
Latino Health Disparities

Smoking Cessation in Latinos

By: Mary Elizabeth Cieslak

This semester I had the opportunity to work at La Fe Policy Research and Education Center. The focus at La Fe is Latino disparities, including those seen in the world of public health.

During the semester I was introduced to several disparities affecting the health of Texas Latinos. The subject I had the chance to work most closely with was Smoking Cessation in Latinos. La Fe had previously completed a brief using 2009 Texas Quitline data on this topic. It was my job over the semester to collect the 2012 data from the TX Quitline and update the brief accordingly; this brief is my final product.

The 2012 data showed that more of the population is using the Quitline as a tool for smoking cessation. The number of call volume increased 198% over the three year period. The data also showed success in increasing the number of Spanish speaking callers.

Public Health Significance

La Fe Policy Research and Education Center really focuses on monitoring current policy issues affecting Latinos. They also make an effort to educate themselves and the local community on these issues and empower people to make sure everyone’s voice is heard.

During my time at La Fe I mostly worked in the education sector by updating the Latino Use of the TX Quitline Brief.

The goal of this brief is to show the current disparities seen in cessation efforts. The data shows us that there is a need for a cessation campaign which targets Latino smokers.

The updated brief also shows us what strides have been made in Latino smoking cessation. By looking at how far we’ve come, we can get a better grasp on what needs to be done next to continue this effort.
Public Health Significance

In terms of the Public Health Essential Service(s) (PHES), this project focused on informing, educating, and empowering HIV positive people about heart health. Furthermore, this project successfully incorporated this service by gaining the support of the FFAC TS clinic and HIV-related CBOs. This allowed us the opportunity to present our educational tools to respondents and the HIV community that ended up being greatly received.

Research is another PHES service that was incorporated in this community service-learning project. Our IPE team successfully participated in research that presented new insights and innovative solutions that addressed cardiovascular disease among HIV positive people. Conclusively our research project successfully collaborated with the local community to develop heart health educational materials that were culturally relevant and effective, and preserved the MillionHearts™ message.

Special Duties

- Poster and brochure design
- Data management

Advice for Future Students

- Don’t be afraid to ask questions
- Talk to various faculty to get an idea of what practicum opportunities are available
- Think outside of the box when searching for a practicum. You may stumble upon a great opportunity, but have to adjust things to ensure it works for you and your academic goals

Myths of FFAC TS of Heart Health: San Antonio’s MillionHearts™

By: Nicole Henry

Interprofessional Education (IPE) is an innovative approach to foster collaboration between students from different health and social care professions. This year nine students from the fields of pharmacy, physician assistant studies, public health, and respiratory care participated in UTHSCSA’s “Interprofessional Care in HIV” course.

IPE faculty and the medical director of the University Hospital Family Focused AIDS Clinical Treatment Services (FFACTS) clinic tasked students with completing a community service learning project that addressed heart disease in the San Antonio, Texas HIV-positive population, and incorporating the ABCS (Appropriate Aspirin use, Blood pressure control, Cholesterol, and Smoking cessation) of the Million Hea RTS™ Campaign.

To accomplish this, we first performed a needs assessment with medical and case management staff at FFACTS, Alamo Area Resource Center (AARC) and San Antonio AIDS Foundation (SAAF) to uncover the importance of heart health and content for a brochure/poster.

Then we created both a tri-fold English/Spanish brochure and a poster that incorporated the prevention message of MillionHearts™ and addressed the needs identified by our community partners.

Next we assessed effectiveness of educational tools and attitudes and behaviors of heart health via heart health knowledge pre/post surveys.

Last, we are analyzing the pre/post-survey data to determine how well our educational tools informed respondents.
# Maternal Obesity/Diabetes Prevention

## Practicum Highlights

- Updating intervention curriculum for target population in South Texas.
- Preparing focus group questions and surveys for population assessment.

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**Testing an intervention is a process that involves many steps and preparation. Assessing and understanding the context of your population is an important beginning to this process.**

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## Bringing the MOMs Healthy Lifestyle Intervention to South Texas: A practicum experience

**By: Rhoda A. Rios**

Research has shown maternal obesity and diabetes to be an important health issue. Healthy Mothers on the Move was an intervention program designed to reduce risk factors for Type 2 diabetes and obesity among pregnant and postpartum Latino women. The intervention was originally developed and implemented in southwest Detroit using a community based participatory research approach.

For this practicum I started working on a project to pilot test the Healthy Mothers on the Move (MOMs) program. The practicum took place at the UT School of Public Health- San Antonio regional campus, under the supervision of Dr. Melissa Valerio.

There were several duties involved in getting this project started.

The program's original curriculum needed to be changed. This involved updating general nutritional information as well as the nutritional information for pregnant and postpartum women. Further revisions also need to be made to the curriculum's Spanish translations. The practicum's final product was the revised and updated version of the curriculum.

Additionally, surveys and focus group questions were prepared for our population assessment. We will soon be traveling to the Valley for recruitment and to conduct focus groups.

## Public Health Significance

The objective of this project is to do a pilot test of the MOMs intervention with a group of pregnant and postpartum Latino women in the Valley.

Implementing interventions, such as the MOMs intervention, involves the Public Health services of informing, educating and empowering. When it comes to the prevention of obesity and diabetes among Hispanic mothers, these services are definitely essential.

At the start of this practicum I was involved in the Public Health Service of Research in order to gain new insights on the topic of maternal obesity and diabetes, as well as potential solutions. Being part of this project is a great learning experience. This practicum has expanded my knowledge and abilities to effectively deliver essential public health services as an MPH graduate student.
Capacity Building in Public Health

Frontera de Salud: Serving the Underserved in South Texas

By: Breanne Schiffer

As part of my project, I worked with Frontera de Salud, an interdisciplinary community service learning organization composed of nursing, medical, pharmacy, and PA students and health professionals dedicated to providing access to medical care for individuals living in underserved regions of South Texas.

My project involved creating a policy and procedures manual for use by community partners and Frontera de Salud leadership when planning community health events.

This project was designed to streamline communication and strengthen the relationship between community stakeholders and individuals involved in our health outreach projects.

The final project involved an event planning timeline and checklist for use by Frontera de Salud leadership staff.

Public Health Significance

This project addressed the effort to develop policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts.

Frontera de Salud is an organization that strives to connect underserved individuals with access to health care in their local communities. Additionally, initiatives are in place to provide health education to individuals in these regions through programs on healthy living, nutrition, vaccinations, and sex education.

This particular project focused on developing a planning timeline and checklist in order to enhance the communication and collaboration between our volunteer efforts and our community partners’ work.

This project provides clear expectations for leadership staff and community partners regarding their coordination efforts and has allowed the organization to expand its efforts to an additional site in South Texas.

Highlights

- Continuation of outreach efforts in Laredo, Robstown, and San Antonio, TX
- Further expansion to McAllen, TX
- Poster presentation at American Medical Student Association National Conference

Lessons Learned

- Involve community partners in developing policies and procedures to ensure stakeholder buy-in.
- Identify recurrent obstacles to be addressed when developing policies and procedures.
- Allow time for “growing pains” with checklist adoption and implementation before rushing to make additional changes.
Preventing Caregiver Burnout

Demonstrating Efficacy of an Evidence Based Intervention: Becoming Proactive rather than Reactive with coping skills

By: Katrina Theis

The intervention involves a 9-week series of guided and supportive small group programs that are aimed at providing education and information about coping techniques that can be used by the caregiver to alleviate stress and prevent caregiver burnout.

By analyzing qualitative and quantitative data from surveys at entry, exit and a 2-month follow-up, caregivers provided a self-assessment of the helpfulness of the program. The surveys measure self-assessed levels of: stress, caregiver burden, spiritual wellbeing, and perceived support. Comparisons of changes over time are assessed for an indication of success and long-term benefit for learned coping skills and positive perceived benefits from the program. My role was to compile the qualitative data and to assist with the quantitative data entry and with the group sessions as needed.

Results of the qualitative data included themes of being grateful to learn that they were not the only ones going through this experience, that others could offer advice and support that was needed, that they had not known how stress could affect their health, many appreciated learning techniques to monitor their breathing, meditative relaxation, using music, art, hobbies, and writing to relieve stress, learning how to reframe negative thoughts, reflective thinking, how to be more positive, how to take better care of their health by addressing sleep, exercise and nutrition habits, and how to get help when needed. While many felt that spirituality was important, it was important to have someone else to talk to that understood what they were experiencing, and that they would recommend the program to others.

Public Health Significance

1. There is a need to understand the challenges that caregivers of injured warriors encounter. Many experience stress as they face unexpected life changes.

2. By informing and educating caregivers about the negative effects of stress and ways to counteract those effects, caregivers are empowered to use coping techniques to minimize the effects of stress.

3. Research regarding the positive effects of this intervention can offer evidence of the need for this program to be offered to others. The VA, and other community partnerships can be encouraged to offer the program as part of a health care model for military families of wounded soldiers.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Learn to breath and think reflectively
- Start planning your practicum as soon as possible
- Talk to people and ask questions
- Start the approval process at least one semester before you plan to work.
- Set up all the paperwork for approval as early as possible.
- Take into account Holidays and Vacation schedules that may delay approvals
- Take into account the delays at the other institutions
- Keep Breathing, learn to meditate
- Enjoy the experience and be adaptable to any changes that may occur
- Find others who can teach you things, don’t expect them to come to you.
- Take care of yourself- eat sleep and exercise well
In 2011, Texas passed a law requiring pre-abortion ultrasounds in which the fetal heartbeat is made audible, and the fetus is described to the patient by her physician, all at least 24 hours before the abortion. The Texas Policy Evaluation Project set out to survey abortion providers and patients about the law’s effects (I helped chase down providers). Preliminary findings show that 89% of women choosing abortion were “extremely confident” or “confident” about their decision before the ultrasound. After the ultrasound, this percentage was unchanged (89%). Women said the ultrasound was not that important for themselves but might help others. The waiting period meant patients had to make two visits; the average woman traveled 42 miles each way, and 23% found it tough to make the second trip.

Public Health Significance

The abortion survey is but one facet of the Texas Policy Evaluation Project (TxPEP), which is examining women’s health outcomes of the 2011 Texas Legislative session. Lawmakers notably cut family planning spending by two-thirds (from $50 million to $15 million). TxPEP is a joint project of UT-Austin’s Population Research Center, IBIS Reproductive Health, and the University of Alabama at Birmingham. The group evaluates effectiveness, accessibility and quality of population-based health services; informs, educates and empowers the public; and mobilizes community partnerships to identify and solve health problems. Other aspects of the ongoing TxPEP analysis:

- Impact of budget cuts on community clinics (I am helping with this part now and this summer). See the web app for details.
- Women’s access to postpartum contraception (including sterilization) in El Paso and Austin since 2011.

Putting it all together

- One practicum highlight: Seeing initial data presented to a packed lecture hall at UT-Austin.
- A second highlight: A collaborative luncheon afterward among academics, activists, lobbyists and medical professionals.

Practicum pearls

- Even though UTSPH-SARC and UT-Austin both fall under “UT,” their IRBs work differently and do not share information. Allow extra time for approvals.
- The networking part of the practicum is as valuable as the work itself.

Check out the new web app! www.prc.utexas.edu/txpep/shows effects of Texas’ family planning cuts, with breakdowns by county, public health region and political district. (Screen shot by Junda Woo)
The STEER Program has three major focuses with regards to public health: education, surveillance and research.

In education, STEER aims to communicate important public health information to the people of the Rio Grande Valley and empower them to improve their community.

With regards to surveillance, STEER focuses on monitoring health trends within the community to observe any patterns that may be concerning. This could include health problems, such as obesity, and the related conditions (diabetes, heart disease, etc.). This may also involve environmental hazards, such as those found at the Donna Reservoir Superfund site or materials crossing the border.

The education and surveillance aspects of STEER are closely related to the research, which centers on identifying public health issues in the area and developing strategies to address these problems.
South Texas Border Health

Practicum Highlights

- Visiting the colonias
- Visiting a curandera
- Learning how the zoo is important to public health
- Learning about biological control of invasive plant species

Health on the Texas-Mexico Border

By: Dana Brown

STEER is a crash course in all things pertaining to public health at the Texas-Mexico border. Our journey led us first to get acquainted with the health culture of South Texas by visiting an hierberia and curandera where we directly observed the healing traditions. Next, we visited the colonias and viewed the conditions in which many Border residents are live. We were further introduced to unique sites such as the Donna Reservoir, agricultural fields, wildlife habitats, and an immigrant detention center. We were then privileged to meet with many of the non-profit organizations and health departments that use their resources to meet the unique need of this population. I personally took an in depth look at child migrants' dangerous journey to America from Central and South America and the intricate legal system they encounter once they arrive in the USA.

Public Health Significance

This practicum demonstrated the following essential public health services:

- Inform, educate, and empower
- Link people to personal health services
- Research for new insight and solutions to health problems
- Mobilize community partnerships
- Develop policies and plans that support health efforts

These services are illustrated readily in the STEER practicum. We engaged extensively with community health workers called promotoras with whom research is being done in South Texas to evaluate the efficacy of promotoras in health outcomes. These trained health workers go into the home to educate and empower the residents, they link them with community partners and services and also advocate for them in the political arena.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Be open to stepping outside of your comfort zone and really immerse yourself into the culture of South Texas, even though some elements may be foreign to you.
- Take everything in! This will most likely be the first and last time you will hear and see many of the things you will encounter.
- Always have your ID and wear comfortable clothes and shoes!

Picture courtesy of www.seaturtleinc.org

A favorite stop was Sea Turtle Inc., where we learned about international sea turtle conservation efforts.
South Texas Border Health

Blending Medicine and Public Health on the Texas-Mexico Border

The South Texas Environmental Education and Research (STEER) program, located in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, focuses on the unique environmental, economic, and sociocultural factors that influence health outcomes along the Texas-Mexico border. During this four week practicum, we witnessed the poverty in the colonias, explored landfills and contaminated lakes adjacent to residential communities, and met with representatives from various agencies involved in border health, and learned about the disease burden present in the LRGV.

STEER successfully blends clinical medicine with public health while promoting cultural competency and patient advocacy. The STEER program provides a new lens through which to view patient care and is a great adjunct to the medical school curriculum.

Public Health Significance

The residents of the Lower Rio Grande Valley experience a disproportionate burden of disease and access to healthcare when compared to the general U.S. population. Moreover, socioeconomic, political, and environmental factors along the border create a unique atmosphere and challenges for the practice of public health.

The essential public health services exemplified by the STEER program include: monitoring health status to identify community health problems; diagnosing and investigating health problems and health hazards in the community; and informing, educating, and empowering people about health issues.

Ultimately, STEER focuses on increasing education and awareness of a variety of public health issues in South Texas with a special emphasis on environmental determinants of health.

Lessons Learned

Overall, those experiences that had the greatest impact on me, individually and professionally, were those that opened my eyes and encouraged me to reevaluate the implications of my own identity and to question any preconceived notions that I held regarding the South Texas border region. Enter STEER with an open mind and a big heart, and you will be enlightened and inspired.

Special Highlights

- Meeting the Castro family, residents of the Green Valley Farms “colonia”.
- Learning about the unique health challenges faced by migrant farm workers.
- Speaking with border authorities about special health topics related to immigration and proximity to a developing country.

Source: http://webhost.bridgew.edu/jhayesboh/musica/Mexico.html

The Lower Rio Grande Valley at the Texas-Mexico Border

Source: http://webhost.bridgew.edu/jhayesboh/musica/Mexico.html

Approximately half a million of America’s poorest residents live in “colonias” scattered across the Texas-Mexico border. Many lack access to such basic resources as water, plumbing, and electricity.

Source: http://www.pbs.org/klru/forgottenamericans/colonias/routeA/A_A_1_a_1.htm

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Environmental Health in South Texas

South Texas Environmental Education and Research

I spent my practicum in the Texas Rio Grande Valley. I spent my time learning about environmental issues unique to the U.S./Mexico border. To facilitate my learning the host organization arranged lectures and site visits regarding a variety of topics. These included migrant health, coastal studies, zoonosis, environmental exposures, a local superfund site, international water and boundary issues, autism and much more.

Special Highlights

- Learning about health issues related to migrant farm workers
- Learning about how the U.S. and Mexico share water drawn from the Rio Grande River
- Learning about the influence of local culture on health and public health interventions

Lessons Learned

- I learned that there is much work to be done in the area of environmental health. There are hundreds of manmade chemicals whose effects on health have not been studied or even considered.

Public Health Significance

The Essential Service of Public Health most closely related to my practicum was the service of monitoring health status to identify community health problems. One of the site we visited was a local Superfund site which was discovered to have dangerously elevated concentrations of polychlorinated biphenyls (PBCs) in the water. This is a particularly concerning area because people catch and eat fish found in the site. We learned about EPA efforts to clean up the site and monitor the community for harmful effects caused by PBCs.

Source: http://steer.uthscsa.edu/
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/