

Public Health Practice



Stories from the Field

The University of Texas School of Public Health
Student Practicum Experiences
Spring 2014 – International

Prevention diabetes safe kids clean water policy disaster response
cancer adolescent sexual health HIV/AIDS research obesity
alcohol empowerment vaccinations maternal & child 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 thirteenth-edition e-magazine showcases student practicum experiences throughout the Spring 2014 semester. (Prior semesters may be accessed through the e-book, a collection of student abstracts and e-magazines describing their experiences.)



Practicum Topics

Serving Size: 1 Practicum per Student

Servings per e-Magazine: 3

Continents/Regions	3
Countries	3

Student

International Practicum Experiences

CENTRAL AMERICA

Guatemala: Guatemala's Health Needs	Paul Yeh
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SOUTH AMERICA

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Physical Activity & Sport Events



Courtesy of CELAFISCS

Health-marketing materials planned to be used by Agita São Paulo during the World Cup this summer. This shows the jerseys indicative of the Brazilian national soccer team along with Agita's mascot and health messaging.

Using Sport Culture to Promote Physical Activity

By: Dean Pham

I completed my practicum at the Physical Fitness Research Center of São Caetano do Sul (CELAFISCS) in Brazil from January to March. I was also collecting data for my practice-based thesis during this time.

I worked specifically on the Agita São Paulo program, which is a community-wide physical activity intervention program that uses an extensive network of partners across multiple sectors to promote active living. Their basic message is to try and acquire 30 minutes of physical activity every day.

I attended meetings to see how the program operates and translated

marketing materials and journal abstracts. I focused on how Agita could partner with World Cup organizers to coordinate physical activity promotion events. My final product was a presentation on the innovative use of online social media sites to promote physical activity.

Aging & Colegiado Meetings

- I traveled to a nursing home where Agita has a biweekly intervention for the elderly and assisted them in their exercises.
- I attended two monthly Colegiado meetings to see current physical activity actions from various partners.

Public Health Significance

CELAFISCS conducts research to form new insights and innovative solutions to health problems. Many of the staff members were busy working on articles, statistical analyses and preparing abstracts.

I helped translate and edit some of their articles and abstracts that were to be sent to academic journals. Some articles will be presented at professional meetings. In this sense, CELAFISCS informs, educates, and empowers local citizens who want to get involved to high-level government officials in the Ministry of Health. I helped fellow estagiários (interns) prepare goody bags with Agita promotional materials to be distributed at workshops.

Agita held a walking parade to celebrate World Day for Physical Activity, mobilizing multiple community partnerships to disseminate the benefits of physical activity.

Lessons Learned

If completing a practicum abroad, be sure you have at least an elementary level command of the language. Be patient dealing with Brazilian bureaucracy (e.g. Consulate's Office, Federal Police). São Paulo was hot, which isn't too bad for a native Texan... but homes do not typically have A/C. Be open and go with the flow.



Courtesy of CELAFISCS

A remarkably international organization: I saw this image every day and was reminded of the impact CELAFISCS has had in international physical activity research. They have received tremendous international recognition for their work.

Urbina, Guatemala's Health Needs



Urbina, Guatemala's Calle Mayor [Main Street]. Personal photograph by Paul Yeh. December 20, 2013.

Characterizing the Health Profile of Urbina, Guatemala: Clinical, Maternal, and Hygiene Issues

By: Paul Yeh

I compiled and assessed the key public health issues for the population in Urbina, a rural community outside of Xela, Guatemala. The project involved both a primary care delivery component and surveying Urbina to learn about its health needs.

For five days, I was part of a medical team that held a mobile health clinic in the greater Xela region. In all five sites, the most common health complaints

were musculoskeletal pain, abdominal pain, and headaches. Visual issues, including eye pain and cataracts, were also frequently encountered.

Partnering with local *Puesto de Salud* health officials, we surveyed Urbina's 737 households. Maternal health (just 21% of all births in 2013 were done in a hospital) and hygiene (out of 767 young children, there were 308 reported cases of diarrhea in 2013) are Urbina's largest health challenges.

Public Health Significance

My practicum most directly addresses diagnosing health problems and establishing community partnerships.

Indeed, I utilized both clinical encounters and public health surveying to analyze Urbina's health needs. Through partnering with local public health officials, I can help characterize Urbina's health profile and begin to address, in the near future, the issues facing Urbina.

Moreover, recognizing how critical

these local health surveyors are to the sustainability of any future public health intervention in Urbina, I helped establish a working partnership with them. Now, as local health officials survey Urbina periodically, medical students in Texas can have access to new health survey data; consequently, we can help monitor Urbina's health and notice any trends. This fruitful partnership, I hope, can serve as a model for other students who may be engaged in addressing another international community's health needs.

Practicum Highlights

- Treated 266 different patient cases in just 5 days of clinic in the greater Xela (Quetzaltenango), Guatemala region
- Brought over 250 pounds of much-needed multivitamins, medicines (e.g. zinc tablets), and medical supplies for the Urbina health clinic

Advice for Future Students

- Always strive to act in a culturally competent fashion, recognizing and adapting to the culture of the people you are working with, as oftentimes they have different cultural nuances and customs that you wish to respect. Doing so will enable you to better connect with the local people!



Hand Washing Demonstration at Urbina Health Clinic. Photograph by Quetzaltenango *Puesto de Salud* Worker. December 13, 2013.

International Health *in Cambodia*

Practicum Highlights

- **Wat Opot Children's Community** – a community in which HIV infected and affected children live and learn together
- **RiverKids Project** – a local non-profit dedicated to providing opportunities for women and children to go to school, work, and be healthy
- **RiveKids Micro-Business Workshop** – a two-day workshop for the women in the micro-business program at RiverKids that reviewed Family Planning and Breast & Cervical Cancer Prevention

Sharing Experiences

- Working/volunteering in another country has been one of my greatest achievements as well as the most rewarding experience thus far – I highly recommend doing a practicum abroad if possible!
- It is a huge challenge to work with people who barely speak English: be patient in any work environment, and don't be afraid to repeat yourself or ask questions – it's better to be clear than to make a mistake!



During a visit to a family in crisis in a slum area of Phnom Penh, trash completely covers the ground and a rickety bridge is all that holds us above it.

Photo by Seiha Khun, RiverKids Volunteer Coordinator

Taken April 23, 2014

Serving the Underserved, Opportunity for the Marginalized

By: Elizabeth Tocco

I have enrolled in Global Service Corps' International Health Program in Cambodia, a program that has connected me with two non-profit organizations in the country. I was first assigned to help out at Wat Opot, an orphanage for HIV infected and affected children, and it's presence for over ten years in the community has transformed a majority of the people's perspective on HIV in the area. The orphanage itself has HIV positive and negative children living together, and the children are accepted at the public school in the community – a rare sighting in Cambodia. As a volunteer, I got to witness how children whose lives have been so impacted by the disease manage in a developing country.

For the remainder of my practicum I have been with RiverKids Project, an organization that reaches out to women and children in the slum communities of Phnom Penh. As a volunteer in the Health Department, we make visits to check up on pregnant women and families with very young infants, distributing assistance funds, formula, and health advice. In addition, we host health workshops for the members of the RiverKids programs. My assignment was to develop a 2-day workshop for the women in the micro-business program which provides positions as seamstresses to women who are otherwise unemployed, HIV positive, or former sex workers. Our topics were Family Planning and Breast&Cervical Cancer, two very critical topics for women in developing countries. The workshop was a success, as the women asked questions, shared their stories, and were very attentive.

Public Health Significance

I observed RiverKids **monitor** community health during regularly scheduled monthly check-ups by a doctor for the RiverKids children and to a certain extent the slum community to assess and treat health problems, keeping track of who comes in and for what health problem. I **informed, educated, and empowered** by holding health workshops for the women in the micro-business program of RiverKids, teaching about health issues such as Family Planning and Breast&Cervical Cancer. I witnessed RiverKids **link** women and children in need to personal health services, especially pregnant women and infants, assuring financial assistance when necessary. I have informally **evaluated** the system at Wat Opot as well as RiverKids in terms of their effectiveness as non-profit organizations that help provide resources to the surrounding slum communities by interviewing my supervisors

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/>