Public Health Practice

Stories from the Field
The University of Texas School of Public Health
Student Practicum Experiences
Spring 2014 – Regional Campuses
The practicum experience is an integral part of the MPH and DrPH curricula. Public health students are provided with the opportunity to apply their classroom knowledge to real world settings through which they make a meaningful contribution to a public health organization.

Under the guidance of a community preceptor and faculty sponsor, students from all divisions gain a deeper understanding of public health practice, interact with professionals in the field, and expand their repertoire of professional skills.

This 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: 13

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Next Steps Program

Assessing Program Implementation

By: David Gomez Jr

Next Steps Program is one of the primary prevention programs from the Childhood Obesity Research Demonstration (CORD) Project designed to prevent obesity. In selected clinics pediatricians are trained in the Next Steps Program, in which physicians counsel patients and families on healthy behaviors.

I was responsible for assessing the degree to which physicians were implementing the program at their clinics. Therefore, I scheduled meetings with different physicians and asked them what they thought about program.

At the end of my practicum I wrote a report of the successful elements of program implementation as well as specific barriers to implementation. As a result, CORD staff can then revise the program to augment program implementation.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience was based on inform, educate, and empower people about healthy behaviors and obesity.

Prevention and treatment of childhood obesity should involve working with a healthcare provider. During the course of 6-12 months families have numerous themed visits with their primary physician.

Clinicians talk and counsel their patients about different healthy behaviors like eating healthy foods, portion sizes, meal patterns, physical activity, and reading food labels. An essential partnership is developed between the provider and patient/family toward improving health.

Special events/ duties during your practicum

- Allowed me to talk with many primary care physicians working with underserved population here in Austin.
- Learned about some of the obstacles that avert physicians from addressing health behaviors.

Lessons Learned

[OR] Advice for Future Students

- Start planning your practicum 3 months in advance.
- Scheduling meetings with Doctors requires willingness to adapt to their schedule.
- Your practicum experience could lead to a job opportunity.
Public Health Significance

Of the 10 essential services of public health, my practicum focused on research and policy development. The study used eye-tracking software to monitor what the children looked at on the screen. While this is a common practice in other industries such as advertising, it has not been applied to public health as frequently. Through this innovative approach, the director hopes to reveal new insights into the children’s behavior.

Measuring and Evaluating the Determinants and Influence of Advertising (MEDIA)

By: Katie Henry

I completed my practicum with the University of Texas Prevention Research Lab, which is housed in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Education. The lab conducts research on health and risk behaviors among college-aged students and adolescents.

While there are multiple projects being conducted at the lab, I was a Graduate Research Assistant on the Fast Food MEDIA Study. This study looks at the effects of television advertising on the fast food choices of children ages 2-11 years old. With high rates of childhood obesity in the United States, it is important to understand various factors that influence childrens’ eating habits.

I was specifically involved in recruiting and scheduling participants, conducting the study, and entering data into the statistical software.

The study will continue into the summer, and the results will be published in an academic journal in the near future.

Advice for Future Students

• Don’t be afraid to ask questions. I learned how the research process works by asking, even if it wasn’t something that I was directly involved with. Use your supervisor as a resource because they have experience and can provide guidance in your public health career.
Physical Activity Program Evaluation

Practicum Highlights

- It was such a great experience working with a team that was dedicated to making a difference.
- The youth certainly kept me entertained with all their enthusiasm and energy!

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Every day of involvement in your practicum is an opportunity to apply your classroom knowledge in the real world. Don’t be afraid to share what you know and learn from everyone around you!

Evaluating the Physical Activity Program at Southwest Trails’ Learning Center

By: ASHLEIGH JOHNSON

My practicum took place with Foundation Communities and the Southwest Trails’ Learning Center (SWT). In order to determine its effectiveness, we conducted a week-long evaluation of the SWT’s after-school physical activity program.

In order to conduct the evaluation, we worked closely with the staff of SWT. It was important to get their help and use their experience to develop an evaluation that could be easily implemented.

Public Health Significance

Foundation Communities, through programs such as the Southwest Trails’ Learning Center (SWT), contributes to a number of the Essential Services of Public Health, including mobilizing community partnerships, developing policies and plans that support community health efforts, and evaluating effectiveness, accessibility and quality of population-based health services.

My practicum at SWT focused on evaluation of health services, specifically in the area of physical activity for students in the after-school program.

Evaluating the effectiveness of the physical activity program, we used pedometers and the SOFIT-R measurement tool.

These tools allowed us to determine how active the students were while at the program and how many steps the students were taking. The SOFIT-R was adapted to our needs so we were able to calculate the amount of time youth spent in moderate-vigorous physical activity (MPVA).

Once the results are gathered, we can compare them to the recommended levels, and make suggestions for improvements.
Hospital-Based Epidemiology

Healthcare Related Research and Surveillance

By: Kassie Pfluger

During my time at Seton, I worked closely with research and healthcare professionals on multiple research projects which were at different stages of development. A few of the Projects included:

- Data Analysis of Clinical Decision Rule for ordering X-ray's in minor musculoskeletal injury’s
- Protocol to assess the effectiveness of a new Sepsis Alert Protocol used by emergency medical personnel
- Statistical Analysis to compare three different helicopter-based mechanical hoist devices

Final Product

- Generated a database of home medications consisting of patients presenting to a Seton Healthcare Family hospital in the greater Austin area with an adverse bleeding event and a history of anticoagulant use

Public Health Significance

Public Health Essential Services (PHES):

- Evaluate effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services.
- Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems.

Highlights/Duties

- Hospital surveillance
- Study evaluation and planning
- Research protocol writing
- Data management

Lessons Learned

- Navigating the plethora of information contained in a patient’s electronic medical record can be overwhelming at first, but patience and persistence goes a long way!
- It is important to read as much literature as possible to become familiar when researching any new or unknown topic.
Go-Slow-Whoa allows us to be conscious of our food choices

Promoting Healthy Nutrition and Activity in Our Youths
By Shradha Thakur

As an intern for Texas CORD working on the CATCH project here in Austin, the main goal is to combat childhood obesity by promoting healthy diet and lifestyle choices in school-age children. The CATCH approach to this issue is unique and multi-dimensional in that it involves education, games and activities, modeling, and it calls upon teachers, administrators, and families to get involved.

Because of this structure, my role was really to be the liaison between the project and schools, specifically to provide assistance to the CATCH champion in schools to ensure that the program was being gradually implemented. I was also able to participate in organizing CATCH events like a CATCH day that dedicates an entire school day towards nutrition and physical education activities.

Overall, it is clear that progress in the implementation of CATCH is best made upon buy-in from administrators and teachers as well as a strong presence from CATCH Champions with assistance from organizations like ours.

Public Health Significance

My practicum was centered on informing, educating, and empowering kids to make diet and physical activity decisions that will lay the foundation for lifelong health. It also sought to evaluate a program methodology that employs many spheres of participants and to identify the challenges and obstacles to complete implementation.

This organization, specifically this branch in Austin, actively seeks to monitor the health and development of elementary children through measures and research conducted regularly. It was an internship that allowed me to see the relationship between academic and health education in our schools. While ensuring kids today gain a strong background in math, sciences, and literature and perform well on standardized examinations is certainly a high priority in many schools during the spring term, where there are passionate health advocates and educators we can certainly see the results reflected in the students.

Practicum Highlights

• Hands on involvement in local schools, observing the exchanges between educators and kids
• Gaining perspective in how school based research is conducted and evaluated

Lessons Learned

A practicum experience gives unique insight into what public health practice in the field is really like. It gave me the opportunity to utilize the knowledge I’ve gained from the classroom, and also to see both the challenges and highlights in a way that a book never could.
Prenatal Breastfeeding Promotion Project

**Highlights**
- Continued follow up and monitoring of the three sites for the project in community Ob/Gyn clinics
- Receipt of grant funding and determination of spending
- Shared data results with team members
- Prepared project history and timeline to document ongoing progress
- Creation of project Facebook page: Prenatal Breastfeeding Promotion Project

**Future Goals**
- Identify the next three sites for project expansion
- Plan implementation at future project sites
- Creation of project website to inform public, share resources and allow for training of interested Ob/Gyn practices

**Breastfeeding Promotion to Address Childhood Obesity**

**By: Melanie Elliott**

The DFW Area Prenatal Breastfeeding Promotion Project is a grassroots initiative as part of the Be Our Voice campaign to reduce the incidence of childhood obesity. The project is endorsed by the Texas Pediatric Society (TPS) of which the primary project leader is a member on the Obesity committee.

The project was developed to provide direct training to Ob/Gyn physicians and staff to promote patient education regarding the health benefits of breastfeeding for both mom and the baby and promote informed decision making prior to delivery.

Simple surveys are administered to expectant moms during the first and last trimester to assess effectiveness of physician interactions.

I assisted in revisions of grant proposals and initial data analysis from completed surveys.

**Public Health Significance**

The DFW Area Prenatal Breastfeeding Promotion Project works to educate and empower community obstetricians on the benefits of prenatal breastfeeding counseling and the long term health benefits in reducing obesity rates.

This project addresses the Public Health Essential Service to “Inform, Educate and Empower people about health issues.”

The project is actively working in Ob/Gyn clinics to support physicians and their staff in providing the most up-to-date information and resources to their patients.

The project will continue to provide educational resources, ongoing support and data collection from patient surveys to determine the effectiveness of the training initiatives.

“I hope you will breastfeed -- it's the best thing for your baby and for your body” - phrase the participating physicians are trained to say to their patients.

http://myamericanconfessions.blogspot.com/2012/05/mommy-mondays-first-time-breastfeeding.html

Retrieved July 26, 2013
Operational and Clinical Excellence

Practicum Highlights

- Attended two-day Lean Six Sigma Yellow Belt course for free (versus paying >$3,000 somewhere else)
- Went indoor skydiving on a team building retreat!
- Will attend the Texas Health Resources Quality Conference in Arlington
- Will present project and become a certified Lean Six Sigma Yellow Belt

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Constantly ask questions to learn as much as possible.
- Talk to and network with everyone you meet.
- Sit in on as many meetings and forums as possible to gain a better understanding of the organization’s mission, vision, values, and culture.
- A semester goes by fast, so make sure not to slack off on your project!

Process Improvement within Healthcare

By: Camille Horbaczewski

The Operational and Clinical Excellence (OCE) Department of Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital Dallas (THD) uses Lean Six Sigma (LSS) methodologies to improve hospital processes and performance.

The OCE department’s top three priorities are patient flow, salary and wages, and patient satisfaction. The team is made of LSS Black and Master Black Belts who train employees to become LSS Yellow and Green Belts to promote a culture of efficiency.

THD has recently implemented Real Time Location System (RTLS) tags to be used on patients, along with equipment and staff. RTLS is becoming increasingly popular in healthcare and provides important data that can be used to monitor equipment and improve patient flow.

My Lean Six Sigma Yellow Belt project focuses on educating the staff to prevent tags from getting lost and to keep them in circulation. Employee training and visual controls are used to hardwire the correct RTLS patient tag processes. The goal is to reduce the percentage of tags lost in 2014 from the previous year.

The implementation and control phases of the project are currently underway, and data is still being collected.

Public Health Significance

The OCE department of Texas Health Dallas eliminates waste and tries to standardize hospital processes to improve patient wait times, reduce extended hospital stays, and increase productivity.

RTLS allows hospitals to gather data on patient flow, and OCE will continue to use this and other methods to collect data for future process improvement projects.

With the rising costs of healthcare, the THD OCE department and others like it will become integral for hospitals to remain efficient. Improving the patient experience while lowering cost of care is vital in today’s healthcare industry, and I’m glad I was able to have this opportunity in operational excellence.
Communities and Infectious Diseases

By: Whitney Thomas

My major task at the Grayson County Health Department was to help contain the spread of several infectious diseases within the county. It began with Shigellosis, quickly followed by Norovirus, and ending with Rabies. I did this through the creation of epidemiology graphs, private interviews, and consulting other state run health departments as to their techniques on handling outbreaks.

For each outbreak I had a specific task. For Shigella, it was to coordinate with out of state agencies and create graphs to predict how long the epidemic would last. For Norovirus, it was conducting one-on-one epidemiological interviews with affected individuals. For Rabies, it was creating a Rabies Prevention guide for the local physicians.

Public Health Significance

The practicum that I have been a part of since January 6th has given me insight into every single Essential Public Health Services. I can think of an experience for each service listed.

• Diagnose and Investigate
• Mobilize
• Develop Policies and Plans

My host organization is involved in every aspect of public health because they are a public health department. From hosting flu shot clinics to interviewing Norovirus patients, to being self critical of how operations are run, the Grayson County Health Department contributes to every single Public Health Service. Some of the projects I was lucky enough to participate in are listed above.

Special events/ duties during your practicum

• Coordinating with other state agencies on prevention techniques.
• Stopping the spread of infectious disease on both a large and small scale.

Lessons Learned

[OR] Advice for Future Students

• Be prepared to exit your comfort zone during your practicum experience. It will not only help you adapt, but to attain knowledge of public health as well.

Shigellosis Bacteria. The cause of the major Grayson County Health Department Outbreak from November 2013-February 2014.


An epidemiological graph that I created to represent where we currently stood in the Shigellosis outbreak. This was presented to students at Austin College, my undergraduate college.

http://heralddemocrat.com/sites/heralddemocrat.com/files/field/media/web1_shigellosis.j
Assessing Cleanliness of the Hospital Environment

Practicum Highlights

- Using Ruhof ATP (Adenosine Triphosphate) Complete to Detect Contamination.
- Contamination Control need Patience and hard work.

Lessons Learned

[OR]

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- In the real-world, to lower hospital contamination hand washing make big different when dealing with the patients.

Hospital Contamination

By: Medhat Daioub, M.D

My experience in the health field and in my practicum in hospital site to use ATP Test Swab to verify cleaning and decontamination process on all hospital surface, such as surgical instruments, staff, scopes, rooms, and doctors hand.

I report the number of contamination anemones to the Public Health and infection control.

I reported the number of contamination in dining area to the supervisor.

Randomly checking the doctor’s hand in operating rooms.

The final report I create to the infection control that dining room very contaminated area and the final product that need to be cleaned multiple time a day. The major finding that hospital contamination real.

Public Health Significance

In the real world of healthcare and hospital siting, contamination is real dangerous to patients, staff, and visitor.

The dangerous of resistant bacteria such as MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus) or TB (Tuberculosis) is real problem to Public Health.

Public Health Professionals and Infection Controls need to be trained and educated continuously about disease prevention and spread of disease. This is where the department of public health and infection control comes into play.

The infection control department at WBAMC monitors and investigates diagnosis depending on the disease and the site of collection.

My example of the dining room contamination was very high in operating room, I inform the chief of the department to fix the contamination immediately.
Young Breast Cancer Survivors

By: Jennifer Garcia-Davalos

I actively participated in several initiatives related to young breast cancer survivorship. I assisted in the development and expansion of the support group, and engaged in researching literature to learn more on cancer among young women.

Tasks involved in the process included actively participating in monthly planning committee and BFF meetings, promoting the support group within the community, collecting baseline health information on all members, providing health promotion information to members, utilizing social media to promote health education, and aid in increasing communication/support among members.

Over the course of the practicum, I assisted in developing infrastructure for the support group by helping create survivor profiles, a member directory, a resource directory, a Facebook page, compiling survivor stories, and developing a manual of operations.

Public Health Significance

The support group empowers young breast cancer patients and survivors to take charge of their overall well-being against cancer. The group takes on issues specifically affecting young women through emotional support, community outreach, healthy lifestyles and vital breast health information.

To accomplish these goals, BFF utilizes several Public Health Essential Services:

1) Informing, educating, and empowering is the basis of the support group by building positive relationships with co-survivors who share similar experiences while encouraging women that life during/after breast cancer does not have to limit quality of life.

2) Mobilizing community partnerships to expand resources in the efforts to tackle issues specific to young women facing breast cancer.

3) Linking survivors to resources and vital health information through educational lecture series and participating in social activities/events.

Practicum Highlights

- Attended interesting medical lectures and participated in fun social activities
- Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure® #1 Fundraising Team!

Advice for Future Students

- Make sure to set time aside to attend support group meetings, educational lecture series, fun activities and other special events; show support for the survivors in their fight against breast cancer!

Image from http://lcmhealthnews.org/little-co-of-mary-is-looking-for-breast-cancer-survivors/

BFF (Breast Friends Forever) Young Survivors Support Group

By: Jennifer Garcia-Davalos

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Community for Children (CfC)

**Dog Safety for the Children of Las Colonias**

By Megan Gribbons

Street dogs are so rampant in the impoverished border communities known as Las Colonias, that they have created a culture of fear, which prevents children in from being able to go outside to play, bike, or even walk to school. Worse yet, these fears are not unfounded—local and regional areas see large volumes of pediatric dog bites. Our group of fourth year medical students partnered with ARISE, a grassroots organization with deep ties to Las Colonias, to design and teach a bilingual dog safety curriculum. Our team created three different curriculums each targeting a specific age group and taught over a hundred community members.

There were many highlights among the way, but serving this curriculum and seeing our curriculum come alive in their capable hands was inspiring.

Future Practicum Students, Take advantage of the proximity of the border. Your time there will be a powerful cultural experience. If you have an opportunity to serve the children of Las Colonias, be prepared to be welcomed with open, warm, and grateful arms—and leave feeling like you could never do enough for this beautiful community.

**Public Health Significance: Inform, Educate, Empower**

Our dog safety curriculum educated, and therefore enabled and empowered the community to protect themselves and their families against dog-related injuries including bites, secondary infections, and acquisition of transmittable diseases like rabies. It seems appropriate that our efforts embodied the essential service that ARISE personifies. In their own words: “the key to empowerment is for women to help other women see that they have talents and gifts that they can use to improve themselves, their families, and their community (1).” Whether it be English classes, vote drives, or diabetes education, ARISE is transforming their community from within.

Source:

1. http://www.arisesotex.org/ariseprofile0.aspx

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Photo Credit: Megan Gribbons
Public Health Significance

While my practicum experience encompassed all components of the essential public health services, the components closest related to my experience as a whole include: Diagnose and Investigate as well as Inform, Educate, and Empower. With respect to diagnosis and investigation, the epidemiologist does both on a daily basis through case contact and medical record analysis. Many people do not know that before a reportable disease is entered into a national database, it has to be confirmed by a public health official. This responsibility to confirm also gives way to the possibility of developing an alternate diagnosis through medical record and patient assessment.

Furthermore, information and education of the public is a large component of a local health department. It is through these efforts that disease incidence will hopefully be reduced in the future. Public health education can be difficult when operating on a limited budget so efforts must be extremely effective. One example occurring at CCDHHS is pertussis education and awareness through the delivering of baby bibs and wipe cases with “propaganda” to persuade individuals to receive the pertussis vaccine. Education in the southern region of Texas, given the diverse population must be handled with care in order to produce desirable results.

Highlight

- Assisting in a case investigation for a reportable disease.
- Identifying trends within reportable disease data after learning to use new analysis software.

Lessons Learned

When working in public health at the community level, there are a lot of political and budget constraints to take in consideration before taking action.

The image above is a spot map created from confirmed and probable dengue cases during the 2013 outbreak in Cameron County. The red dots represent cases (white borders imply multiple cases in region) and the yellow line identifies the US-Mexico border. (Created using Epi Info)
The 2+2 Asthma Crew is a collaboration between UTHSCSA Department of Respiratory Care and North East Independent School District (NEISD) that is supported by the Chest Foundation MacCaffree Humanitarian Award. This asthma education project under the direction of De De Gardner, MSHP, RRT, FAARC served 5 elementary school campuses within (NEISD) of San Antonio, Texas. The practicum started Jan. 26, 2014-May 15, 2014.

Asthma prevalence rates at the 5 elementary campuses are above the district average of 12%. These schools are considered economically disadvantaged and have been identified as areas where asthma may be negatively impacting students’ ability to meet full academic potential. This is based on prevalence rates, aggregate inhaler usage, and campus nurse feedback.

The 2+2 Asthma Crew provided free asthma education through activities, asthma measurement devices, and presentations to children with asthma and their parents. A pre and post Asthma Control Survey and documented number of child visits to the school nurse for scheduled visits versus those due to asthma issues and absenteeism pre and post the asthma program helped evaluate the program.

**Public Health Significance**

Monitor health: NEISD developed an asthma educational program; however, in 2012 the program was dissolved. This is where the partnership with Dept of RC developed.

Diagnose and investigate: The district determined there were a large number of students missing school, many had asthma.

Inform, educate, empower: The program education focuses on recognizing the early signs and symptoms asthma. The program empowers the child to take control of the asthma the parents are not always around. And it empowers the parents to recognize the issues and to see a physician one on one in the program.

Mobilize community partnerships: The HSC obtained a grant to sustain the program in the elementary schools and also partnered with Dr. Kelly Smith’s group. We also partnered with industry to donate peak flow meters and spacers.

Asthma Education

By: Kristina Ramirez

Duties:
- Developed 5 written communications
- (in English and Spanish) informing families about the program.
- Met with the director of health services, school nurses and principals at each school to coordinate the asthma program.
- Researched the demographics of the 5 schools and educated myself on cultural communication norms.
- Created a data collection tool for recording pre/post program attendance, medication use, and nurse visits, pre/post program Asthma Control Survey.
- Summarized and interpreted the data.

A data collection tool (excel spreadsheet) collected; attendance, as needed reliever medication use, number of scheduled reliever medication use, number of scheduled reliever medication survey and the Asthma Control Survey pre and post asthma program.

The major findings were suggestive that educational sessions on asthma triggers, asthma medication knowledge and usage, and use of spacer and peak flow meter appear to decrease the amount of times students are sent to school nurse for prn reliever medication use usage and asthma related events.

Link to and provide care: We were able to connect the physician with the school nurse, child and parent.

Assure competent workforce: We taught the respiratory care students how to best manage asthma for them to practice with the best competencies.

Evaluate: An evaluation tool was created and the results are shared with the school nurse and principal.

By educating children with asthma to recognize their early warning signs and identify triggers, the program has empowered the student to control his/her asthma management.

Forming a partnership among the student, parent(s), and school staff plays an important role in helping students manage their asthma by implementing this asthma management program.

**Advice for Future Students**

Do your best to learn how to improve your project for the future. Also, it is important to keep constant communication with your community preceptor for the effectiveness and cohesiveness of the project.

Respiratory students teaching children how restrictive airways feel.

Photo courtesy of Dede Gardner

Special events/duties
- Educating asthmatic children and their parents about asthma and how to better manage it to help improve their quality of life was an amazing opportunity.
- Special efforts were made to include Spanish speaking children and parents within these schools to focus on minimizing the language barrier gap.

Respiratory students teaching children how asthma relates to the weather.

Photo courtesy of Dede Gardner
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/