Public Health Practice

Stories from the Field
The University of Texas School of Public Health
Student Practicum Experiences
Summer 2012 - Biostatistics
The practicum experience is an integral part of the MPH curriculum. 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 eighth-edition e-magazine showcases student practicum experiences throughout the Summer 2012 semester. (Prior semesters may be accessed through the Practicum e-Mag link, on the Office of Public Health Practice website.)
# Practicum Topics

**Serving Size:** 1 Practicum per Student  
**Servings per e-Magazine:** 5

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## Biostatistics

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Texas Health Steps

By: Sarah Ynez Chavez

Specialized Health and Social Service Program Initiative

The Texas Department of State Health Services’ (DSHS) mission is “to improve health and well-being in Texas.” There are 11 regions in Texas. The 6/5 south region serves Houston and some surrounding communities. DSHS offers a variety of health care services locally and statewide, one being Texas Health Steps (THSteps). THSteps is particularly intended for children from birth to 20 years of age who are Medicaid recipients. This class can receive periodic screening, vision, hearing, dental and preventative services at no cost. Many medical services are provided such as a medical checkup, comprehensive health and developmental history examination, immunizations, laboratory screenings, health education and additional services. THSteps providers have a profile listed in Online Provider Lookup (OPL). OPL is a public website that clients can use to locate providers accepting Medicaid and THSteps. THSteps medical and dental providers are the cornerstone which can ensure that eligible children and young adults have access to health care on a regular basis. Provider recruitment and retention efforts are an important aspect of THSteps to administer and promote a healthy Texas.

For more information:

Department of State Health Services

www.dshs.state.tx.us/thsteps/about.shtm

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience at the Texas Department of State Health Services, Texas Health Steps program, consisted of active participation and involvement of medical and dental providers and case management services. Provider contact information is an important aspect for Medicaid patients so that they will have accessible information regarding health care services. Data processing and analysis continues to play an integral role as well as maintaining communication and retrieving updated information from providers. The expansion of recipient awareness of medical, dental, and case management services is also performed through outreach and informing efforts. Additionally, recruiting and retaining a qualified provider pool ensures that young people will have access to THSteps services on a regular basis. Utilizing THSteps to assure effective and accessible quality of health services will significantly promote public health initiatives and programs in communities throughout Texas.
Change for Immunization Policy in Texas

By Mingchen Fu

I’m working on a survey-based research which primarily investigates physicians’ attitude and knowledge on immunization. The purpose of this project is to evaluate what changes are needed with regard to Texas immunization policy and health care provider immunization education with the ultimate goal of improving immunization rates in Texas.

The host organization I’m working for is Doctors for Change, a nonprofit I program for health care promotion in Texas. I primarily work for the project for immunization policy change. I also do statistical work for other projects in the organization. I did a bill for immunization policy change and I’m completing a survey report about physicians’ attitude and knowledge on immunization in Texas.

Based on our study, immunization-registry system, vaccination among health workers and the maternal immunization are the three issues that need to be focused on with regard to Texas immunization policy.

Public Health Significance

The program fits into core function of assessment and policy development.

Through this project, we (1) provide information about the immunization attitude and knowledge of Texas pediatric, family practice, OB/GYN, and internal medicine providers; (2) evaluate physician feedback on the TX immunization registry as well as barriers to HCW immunization and maternal immunization. We could provide an evidence-based recommendation for improvements in Texas immunization policy through the project. Meanwhile, we directly provided our suggestion for Texas immunization policy change by writing a bill.

The host organization I’m working for is “Doctors for Change”. It is a nonprofit organization which serves as an educational resource for the entire community and as a forum through which a better health care can be advocated for.

Communicating with people in other projects in “Doctors for Change”

We had several meetings for people in different research projects in “Doctors for Change” to communicate with each other. I found it quite important and interesting! Through which I could get a holistic notion about what is going on in the whole program and make a better plan for my own work!

Do communicate with people when doing your work!

Keep communicating with your preceptor, faculty advisor, and other people who is related to what you are doing, such as the experts in your working field, and other employees who are working with you. You will learn much from them by communicating!
The goal of the practicum was to assist investigators from the UT Medical School and School of Public Health interested in developing prostate cancer database from negative and positive prostate cancer biopsies derived from the Harris County Hospital District (HCHD) cancer registry. Variables of interest identified in developing the database include age, race/ethnicity, weight, height, PSA level, survival information, cholesterol, insulin and glucose level.

Public Health Significance

In the United States, prostate cancer is an important public health problem. Other than skin cancer, prostate cancer is the most common cancer in American men and it is the second leading cause of cancer death in American men, behind only lung cancer. According to the American Cancer Society (ACS) latest estimates, about 241,740 new cases of prostate cancer will be diagnosed and 28,170 men will die of prostate cancer in 2012. One in 6 men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during his lifetime with 1 in 36 dying prostate cancer.

My specific duties and responsibilities were data abstraction and data mining. The one day training I received from the HCHD Information Technology Department was instrumental in understanding the EPIC computer software system the HCHD uses to collect patient data.

As a future biostatistician planning to work in the health care area, I strongly believe that this practicum has helped me develop the necessary real-world practical experience and confidence by applying theoretical statistical methods I learned in classroom.

Developing a prostate cancer database from positive and negative biopsies in the Harris County Hospital District (HCHD) is imperative so that investigators would use the database to understand the etiology of prostate cancer. In addition, having a prostate cancer database would help researchers find better ways to diagnose and treat prostate cancer through identification and monitoring of innovative solutions to prostate cancer and contributes to cutting edge research.
Navigating Sponsored Breast Cancer Patients

Patient Navigation at The Rose

General Patient Navigation starts with the first contact from an uninsured patient and provides one-on-one advocacy and mentoring support for the patient to overcome barriers such as language, transportation, cultural myths, and childcare.

The Patient Navigator then guides patients through the entire process from screening to diagnosis.

Once diagnosed, the Patient Navigator guides breast cancer patients through their treatment plan, providing eligibility paperwork, translation, education, post-surgical needs such as prostheses, and access to other medical resources they may need to expedite healing and recovery.

If a breast cancer patient is unable to get sponsored through other resources, the patient navigator gets her into the Physician Network Program that provides implementation and design for developing a healthcare network capable of providing standard levels of treatment and care to uninsured or underinsured patients.

Source: The Rose Website

Cost Analysis of Navigating Breast Cancer Patients at Various Stages

By: Naaila A. Sami

According to American Cancer Society, in the United States, one in eight women is at risk of developing breast cancer during her lifetime. Early detection is the key to survival for women with breast cancer. Going through breast cancer is not only hectic but also very expensive.

According to a study conducted at University of Illinois, Chicago, “Shortening the time between an abnormal screening result and diagnosis by six months could increase the life of a patient with breast cancer by a year and save $95,625 per patient, per year” (Calhoun 2010)

Patient Navigators guide cancer patients through the overwhelming path to survival by ensuring the timeliness of services at various points in a cost-effective manner.

Public Health Significance

Navigating Rural Highways

The Rose contributes significantly to public health by monitoring breast cancer needs in various parts of Texas. The Rose mobilizes community partnerships to identify and solve breast health problems and also informs, educates, and empowers women to take charge of their own health. Linking women to needed breast health services and assuring the provision of health care when otherwise unavailable is the hallmark of The Rose.

My practicum at The Rose would help in evaluating the effectiveness of personal population-based health services. This would also help in policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts.
Respiratory Protection Program

Practicum Highlights

- Develop a respiratory protection program for Texas Department of State Health Services - Region 6/5S
- Implementation of a written respiratory protection program.

Employee Health and Respiratory Protection

By: JING ZHANG

I take my practicum in Texas Department of State Health Services - Region 6/5S (DSHS HSR 6/5S) this summer. The work I have done here mainly focuses on employee health. I assist my preceptor to develop a respiratory protection program to protect the employees in DSHS HSR 6/5S from potential respiratory hazards. And this program must meet the requirements of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

So the final product will be a draft of respiratory protection program with required worksite-specific procedures and elements for required respirator use. I think DSHS provides a good opportunity for me to understand public health system, such as the organizational structure of public health, public health activities, rules, regulations & laws related to public health, and the internal coordination in a health service agency.

Public Health Significance

Public health practitioner, especially outworkers usually have more opportunity to expose to hazardous substance which is harmful to respiratory system than general population. Therefore we develop this plan to provide all employees here with a safe and healthy work environment. The work I have done so far could be described as develop policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts, which is one of the essential services of public health under the policy development function.

DSHS HSR 6/5R is responsible to provide public health services to the citizens in the county area of southeast Texas, assesses and assures the health in this area. For example, the tuberculosis program is to prevent the spread of tuberculosis in Health Service Region 6-5 South through: clinical management of persons suspected of having or confirmed to have tuberculosis, identification, screening and treatment of contacts to cases, education about tuberculosis. The services and programs in DSHS cover almost all essential services of public health.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Face your work bravely and be certain of your own abilities.
- You may not have a clue about what you will do at the beginning, but you will find everything becomes clear as you work on it.

Air-purifying Respirator

For more information regarding The University of Texas School of Public Health, Office of Public Health Practice and the practicum program, please visit: http://sph.uth.tmc.edu/practicum/