Public Health Practice

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

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

This fourteenth-edition e-magazine showcases student practicum experiences throughout the Summer 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:** 10

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<th>Approximately 12</th>
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## Management, Policy & Community Health

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Healthy Living Matters (HLM) is directed by Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services (HCPHES). Their Built Environment and Food Access Assessment resulted in policy recommendations. HLM received a Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health grant to carry out their recommendations in north Pasadena, Texas, an area with high childhood obesity rates.

I started out with researching policies and best practices because HLM is directed by the Office of Policy and Planning at HCPHES. Besides the policy research, I am involved in several community projects targeting Pasadena, such as the Pasadena Healthy Corner Store Pilot (flyer below), Healthy Dining Matters, bring resources like bike racks, children helmets and healthy recipe cookbooks to the community. The tasks I have done through these projects include: making a budget, drafting a memorandum of understanding, designing various marketing materials, and helping plan and conduct community events.

The Public Health Essential Services encountered:

Mobilize community partnerships to identify and solve health problems.

Develop policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts.

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

Assure a competent public health and personal health care workforce.

Below is a flyer for the Healthy Corner Store pilot which brings healthier food and drinks to corner stores.

Final Products

I created a line-item community garden budget that is being used in a grant application.

Two other major final products are a safe neighborhood survey and a safe neighborhood toolkit, with the majority of the work done by me and another student from Texas A&M School of Public Health.

Lessons learned

To be faster in responding to my emails. When doing community outreach tasks, I really appreciate it when I hear back quickly because I have a timeline. People on the other line do as well.
THE BLUEPRINT: Clinton and Health

Health Architect: My Piece of the Blueprint

By: Michelle Eunice

Despite its robust medical center and growing economy, Harris County has a problem—its health. For the past few years, Houston/Harris County has undoubtedly been considered one of the fattest cities in America. Just as shocking are the 30% of uninsured persons living in the region.

When I joined the Clinton Foundation, my first task was to research nine public health issues in Harris County including clinical care access, healthy eating/food quality, and physical activity. After collecting data from sources such as the County Health Rankings database, I translated the information into easy to read one page reports which were presented to over 150 stakeholders at the Foundation’s Blueprint conference in Houston. Several of these documents were used to develop a Blueprint for Action to improve health in the Harris County community. Today, the Houston and Harris County Blueprint for Action report can be found on the Clintonfoundation.org website.

Public Health Significance

The Clinton Foundation Community Health Matters Initiative closely relates to four of the Essential Services of Public Health: Research, Monitor, Diagnose and Investigate, and Mobilize.

My projects working on the Blueprint report, researching local smoking ordinances in Harris County, identifying community safety organizations, and brainstorming ideas with stakeholders specifically supports the research, investigation, and mobilization components of the Essential Services.

Through strategic partnerships, the Clinton Foundation is able to mobilize community leaders, organizations, and residents, and together improve the greatest public health issues facing the Harris County community.

Since working with the Foundation, I have learned the importance of gaining the support of individuals from different socioeconomic, political, and ethnic backgrounds in order to achieve sustainable public health results and transform communities for the better.
HEALTH INNOVATION HIGHLIGHTS

- Working closely with health counselors, health coaches and participants, I was able to help others make positive health changes.
- Helping individuals become healthier has provided me with a better understanding of public health.
- I learned the importance of healthy eating habits and the difficulties of quitting smoking.

LESSONS LEARNED DURING PRACTICUM

I think communication is the most important quality to have in a work place. It is important to share ideas and to understand the perspectives of co-workers. At memorial Hermann communication was the key to this successful intervention.

Listening to group members is another important concept. Students participating in a practicum should always listen and share ideas. Everyone’s ideas and questions are always valuable, they cause others to think more.

THE JOURNEY TO WEIGHT LOSS

By: Christina Georgalos

HIP has started a weight management program for employees at Memorial Hermann Hospital. The program includes an individual and group counseling session for weight management, tobacco cessation, general health improvement, and chronic health management. Vitals are taken from each participant to determine if they qualify for the study. The participants are given a survey at the beginning of the intervention and at the end which includes questions about health behaviors such as intake of food, drinks and other substances,

Physical activity, sleep and rest, self-care, personal motivation and self-efficacy, social influence and environmental influence. During group sessions each individual speaks about their personal feelings and the participants give their feedback about what they think of the situation. The individual counseling sessions are meant to provide the participant the time to talk about personal feelings during this process of behavior change. The results of this intervention are that participants are losing weight and making positive health changes.

PUBLIC HEALTH SIGNIFICANCE

This intervention is a public health concern because the weight of an individual has a great impact on their lives. Obesity is an important health topic in America today. Obesity leads to many other health complications which can shorten the lives of individuals.

The three essential public health services that closely relate to this practicum on weight management are Inform, educate, empower, link and assure. Inform, educate and empower individuals about health concerns. Linking people to desired health services. Assure a competent public health and personal health care workforce.

The service of Inform educate and empower has occurred at this practicum. During group meetings participants are educated on making healthy life goals and decisions. They are given encouragement to achieve these healthy life goals. Linking occurred during this program by providing individuals with health services for weight management. Assuring occurred during this program by creating a personal health care workforce, this intervention is targeted only towards employees.
Public Health Significance

My Practicum relates most closely to the Public Health Essential Service Number 6, enforce laws and regulations that protect health and ensure safety. For example, in one of the projects, I assisted a Vietnamese elderly man in a pro bono case involving personal injury caused by dog bite. To help drafting the plaintiff’s petition, I researched the City and County Ordinances on safe handling of domestic animals and available remedies for the plaintiff.

I also had the opportunity to apply my knowledge of health policy into real-life situations. During estate planning consultation, I was able to explain to the clients in details the importance of having a medical power of attorney and an advance directive in end-of-life arrangements. Getting to draft these instruments myself, in turn, enriched my understanding of their purposes in the context of unique individual’s needs and concerns.

Legal Issues in Public Health

I completed my Summer 2014 Practicum working as a legal assistant at Denson & Tang Law Firm, a “boutique” private law practice in Houston. The firm specializes in business transactions, estate planning, real estate and general legal advice for a diverse clientele of companies doing business both domestically and internationally.

My duties include interacting with clients, drafting various legal instruments such as wills, power of attorney, business formation documents etc., and conducting extensive research of statutes and case laws on topics such as the Medicaid estate recovery program or the City Health Code on LexisNexis and law journals.

In addition, I developed a summary guide to help the law firm employees understand the basics of the Affordable Care Act and how it will affect them as employees of a small business, when the insurance mandate and the Exchange come into effect.

Advice for Future Students

• If you are interested in a site not in the approved list of Practicum sites, do not hesitate to proactively contact the site and develop your own Practicum. You will never know what opportunity awaits!
Improving Clinical Process

By: Youngran Kim

Clinical Process Analysis to drive improvement in clinical quality and financial performance.

I have been interested in efficiency of health care delivery and quality improvement. The Office of Performance Improvement at MD Anderson was a great choice for me to explore what could be done in the clinical setting. Our team at this department mainly analyzes clinical process and tries to find any opportunities to improve process using a process flow chart. I was allowed to participate in one of major projects and was able to capture current process and identify any opportunity for improvement. By learning and exercising these activities, I have obtained valuable hands-on training including learning necessary tools for quality improvement in health care such as Lean/6 sigma, process mapping, PDSA and leadership skills.

Public Health Significance

Among the 10 essential public health services, my practicum involves evaluating effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services. Improving clinical processes has great implications for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of care. Being a leader in cancer treatment, there are many patients waiting to have access to MD Anderson. By improving efficiency and reducing wait time, more patients can be served in a timely manner.

Practicum Highlights

- Learned frameworks for Quality Improvement at MD Anderson
- Got involved in the three phases of clinical process analysis project
- Created a comprehensive visual display of current work process using Microsoft VISIO software
- Identified opportunities for improvement
- Learned to calculate direct labor costs from process flow charts.

Advice for Future Students

- Be proactive in searching for what you want to accomplish through practicum!
- Guest speakers to your class are experts in their areas and can be an excellent resource for finding opportunities.
- Start looking for practicum sites as early as possible, especially if you are international students.

Summer 2014 • Youngran Kim • Office of Performance Improvement at MD Anderson • Clinical Process Improvement
LONG-TERM OUTCOMES FOLLOWING PANCREATIC SURGERY

Assessing Outcomes Following Pancreatectomy

By: Somala Mohammed

My practicum has allowed me to become immersed in the clinical and research environment of the Elkins Pancreas Center at Baylor College of Medicine. One reason why I pursued an MPH was to better understand health services organization and better combine outcomes based research with clinical practice. This practicum has allowed me learn how to develop a cross-sectional research study and develop a system for assessing quality of life, nutrition, and pancreatic function in a systematic manner among patients who underwent surgery to remove their pancreas.

Over the summer practicum experience, I was involved in drafting the IRB documents for this project, identifying patients to include in the study, organizing and developing details of the study (quality of life surveys, food diary, determining which laboratory data points to include for assessing pancreatic function), and conducting literature review.

Public Health Significance

This project relates to the following American Public Health Association’s 10 Essential Public Health Services:

- **Monitor** health status to identify community health problems.
- **Diagnose and investigate** health problems in the community.
- **Inform, educate and empower** people about health issues.

This project focuses on patients who underwent surgery at least 3 years ago to remove part of their pancreas for non-cancer related diseases. Among this cohort, the objective is to determine what impact removal of the pancreas had on nutritional status, quality of life, and pancreatic function of the patient.

Identifying what impact complex pancreatic surgery has will allow us to better inform our patients on what to expect after surgery and how to improve nutritional status, quality of life, and pancreatic function in the long-term for these patients. The project also develops a system to potentially monitor these parameters in a prospective manner.

Duties during practicum experience

- Attend weekly research meetings
- Develop documents for IRB submission
- Identify data points of interest
- Gather relevant data elements
- Develop database for clinical research

Lessons learned during practicum experience

- Successful research involves teamwork and careful planning
- Communication is essential when working as part of a team

Surgical removal of all or part of the pancreas can affect function of gastro-intestinal system.

Photo courtesy of mSurgery

Surgical removal of all or part of the pancreas can affect function of gastro-intestinal system.
Increasing Access to Nutritious Foods

Get Moving Houston Farmers’ Market Initiative

By: Oscar Peña

I interned with the Farmers’ Market Initiative at the Department of Health and Human Services. Every Thursday, starting in April, we had a farmers’ market alternating between the Sunnyside and Magnolia Multi-Service Centers.

These two communities were selected for the market because they are deemed food deserts by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). A food desert is an urban area without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. Instead these communities are serviced by convenience and fast food establishments.

My role was to assist my site preceptor with the weekly market operations. Additionally, I inputted sales data, created educational materials, and wrote a final report detailing the success of this year's market.

Public Health Significance

The essential public health service that my practicum encompassed was mobilizing community partnerships to identify and solve health problems.

The farmers’ market was made possible with the collaborative efforts of the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) and Hanka Farms. The FMNP gave a voucher to WIC participants to use to purchase fresh produce from farmers’ markets. The catch being that the farmer had to be registered with the state to accept the vouchers.

We teamed up with Hanka Farms from Wharton County to be our main vendor. The Hanka family provided thousands of dollars of produce every week at our markets.

These collaborations allowed us to create a streamlined process. Participants received vouchers at the multi-service center WIC clinics, the same locations where we setup the weekly markets. Without community partnerships we would not have been able to provide such a successful program to these communities.

The importance of cultural awareness

The Magnolia Multi-Service Center serves a community that is over 95% Hispanic. Many of these women did not speak any English. The center itself has many employees who speak Spanish, however our program did not.

I am bilingual in English and Spanish. I was able to utilize my language skills to facilitate the usage of the market by this population. I was thanked by many of the participants for assisting them in Spanish. Some said that they would have left without using their voucher had I not been there.

The lesson here is that it is important to understand the population you serve.
Encountering Obesity as a Family

A program designed to decrease the prevalence of overweight families in the San Antonio area.

By: Sanjuana Rodriguez

Project Measure Up (PMU) is a project design to prevent childhood obesity with the help of the entire family.

The participants were invited to participate in a 12 week program in which we monitored their weight, encouraged them to exercise, taught them nutrition classes, such as, rethink your drink, vegetables/fruits, vitamins, calorie intake, portions and more.

My role was to: teach the nutrition classes, evaluate the participants at the end of the program through a heart rate monitor, collect data as well as input data into the system and to follow up with the participants before every session.

I created a vitamin poster design to teach them the importance of getting their vitamins through the food they consume daily.

Inform, educate and empower: by teaching them how to eat healthier and to exercise as a family.

Evaluate: the participants were happy with effectiveness of the zumba classes (many have lost more than 10 lbs), the weekly events are easy to access and are close to their homes, and the zumba instructors are high qualified.

Obesity has become one of the biggest problems many people face. On the bright side, however, entire families are being challenged to stay active as a family. Everything starts with the parents by teaching their children to stay healthy.

Photo description and source: Big Event, promoting health to the entire family.

http://www.healthcollaborative.net/

• Big event: Challenge participants to come to the event every month to continue exercising as a family and to do other fun activities.

• I was able to make families aware of the obesity problem we face today.

• Encourage families to exercise as a family.

Families exercising together to achieve the goal of living a healthier life.

Photo source: http://www.healthcollaborative.net/
Transitioning into Adult Medical Care

Researching the Extent of Knowing Personal Medical Information and the Significance of Transitioning out of Pediatric Care

By: Dixie Sasu

For my practicum, I am working at the Harris County Juvenile Justice Center (HCJJC) in the medical department. Through the CATCH Grant, I am conducting surveys pertaining to adolescents and their medical homes. In relation, I also shadow Dr. Benjamins at the University of Texas Health Science Center Pediatric Infectious Disease (ID) Clinic in the Medical Center.

Based on the information I am collecting and the patients I am observing, it is evident that there is a lack in the transition from pediatric care to adult medical care. Therefore the goal of the research being conducted is to develop a plan that supports individual and community health efforts in successful transitioning of adolescents into adult care. This goal will be reached through evaluating the accessibility of health services and linking people to needed personal health facilities.

Public Health Significance

The Public Health importance of this practicum is to empower adolescents to learn their medical history and educate them about the importance of knowing their medical past (through transition activities). My practicum is searching for ways to educate and empower adolescents about their health issues because of the matter that many adolescents do not grasp the depth of their medical care.

Through assessment, policy development, and assurance programs such as the CATCH Grant and the Teen Leadership Forum the issue is being addressed and gradually solved.

AIDS Foundation Houston Teen Leadership Forum (June 19-June 24)
- 6 day camp for 17-19 year old teens infected with HIV
- Teens participated in learning sessions covering topics on effective communication skills, nutrition, medication adherence, family planning, and transitioning into adult health care.
- I, along with 3 other adults, served as mentors during the camp.

Source: http://www.itimes.com/blog/top-10-summer-programs-for-kids

EXPANDING EVIDENCE-BASED PARENTING PROGRAMS IN HARRIS COUNTY

By: HANNAH VARDY

Children at Risk’s Center for Parenting and Family Well-Being has been working to promote evidence-based parenting education programs in Harris County and beyond in order to prevent child abuse, neglect and develop positive parenting practices. A pilot program utilizing Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) took place last year, and much of my work this summer involved evaluating the results of the program. Overall, there was a statistically significant increase in knowledge and skills gained for parenting and a decrease in child behavioral problems!

PUBLIC HEALTH SIGNIFICANCE

Evidence-based parenting programs can help reduce child abuse, which can impact the overall health and well-being of children. The Center for Parenting and Family Well-Being focuses on several of the Public Health Essential Services:

- Mobilize Community Partnerships: the Center works with numerous community organizations, fostering partnerships to promote parenting education and to host parenting classes and workshops.
- Develop Policies and Plans: by drafting legislation, talking to interested members and working with the organization’s legislative consultant, the Center has been developing policies and plans to address parenting issues.
- Evaluate: the evaluation of the Triple P pilot program focused on the effectiveness of this population-based intervention.

Additionally, the Center has been focusing on legislative priorities for the next session. I have been researching and drafting bills this summer concerning the expansion of parent education in both Houston and Texas as a whole. Children at Risk is a research and advocacy organization, and much of their work focuses on efforts to promote evidence-based practices and legislation that creates a better future for the children of Texas.

EXPANDING PARENTING EDUCATION

Source: childrenatrisk.org

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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/