Public Health Practice

Stories from the Field
The University of Texas School of Public Health
Student Practicum Experiences
Fall 2011 – Health Promotion & Behavioral Sciences
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 sixth-edition e-magazine showcases student practicum experiences throughout the Fall 2011 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: 12

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### Health Promotion & Behavioral Sciences

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HIV Intervention for Young Black Men Who Have Sex with Men (YBMSM)

Research to Evaluate a Community-level Intervention Adapted for Young Black Men that Have Sex with Men

By: Aite O. Aigbe

Description

This research study was sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The overall mission was to determine how to develop quality community-based health services aimed to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS among Young Black Men that have Sex with Men (YBMSM).

The University of Texas, School of Public Health was in charge of conducting the research study within Houston, TX. I was a recruiter and data collector. My team and I went to gay bars/venues and used a handheld computer-assisted program called the Questionnaire Development System (QDS) to screen and recruit participants for the study. Likewise, the QDS was also used to administer the questionnaire to gather data. We were successful in reaching our quota by recruiting 333 eligible participants to partake in the study.

Public Health Significance

This study allowed for us to gain insight into the experiences faced by young black men within the gay community. By utilizing epidemiological surveillance methodologies to investigate the health status of this target population, we were able to identify HIV-related issues and other health problems present within the community. This was accomplished by gathering data on behavioral indicators and demographic indicators (i.e., background, friends, attitudes, sexual activity, and drug use).

This information will be useful for creating HIV/AIDS intervention and prevention care treatments programs as well as educating health practitioners/professionals about the prevalence of HIV-related factors present among YBMSM. In addition, the aggregate data will help to ensure decision makers are equipped with appropriate information to provide guidance for policy development and resource allocation designated for future HIV prevention efforts.

A Pearl of Wisdom

“One must be very open-minded to the ‘good, bad, and the ugly’ characteristics of the community one chooses to serve. Hence, in order for one to work with the community to improve their health status, one must learn to fully embrace their culture.”

--A. Aigbe
The internship at Midwives Alliance of North America (MANA) was an online practicum. The focus of this internship was to assist the Division of Research (DOR) in locating funds to support the Minimum Birth Data Form project. The DOR’s goal was to fund the project through potential researchers and to include organizations that were a part of the midwife community as well as organizations that were not affiliated with the midwifery community.

The outcome of the search resulted in comparison studies of other Midwives, organizations to determine how they supported and sustain their projects.

**Public Health Significance**

**To provide objective data to researchers**

The Division of Research’s purpose in creating the minimal birth data form (MBDF) was to standardize the demographic, medical history, birth and outcome information obtained by the midwives. The goal of the Division of Research was to create a database of birth statistics from the midwives to provide objective data to researchers. This data will further the goal of evidence based care, as well as allowing research to demonstrate that home deliveries that are planned and assisted by a midwife represent a viable option for healthy pregnant women.

• Created a Report for MANA’s Division of Research, “Funding options for the Minimal Data Birth Form”

• Developed a 2nd document for MANA with emphasis on membership drive, This document includes; surveys, comparison studies of other Midwifery organizations, and information about membership drives.

Midwives deliver many healthy babies.

http://www.educarer.org/
Hepatitis C: Know the Facts

Innovative testing strategies to raise Hepatitis C awareness in the Houston community

By Tanisha Darko

I spent the Summer and Fall of 2011 completing research on effective prevention programs. While completing research I became part of a planning and evaluation team for a Hepatitis C testing initiative at Houston Astros Ballpark. Testing sites were conducted amongst three cities: Houston, Chicago, and St. Louis. Prior to testing days, over twenty organizations were brought together to discuss best strategies for testing. I created a logic model for the event to gauge what is required to support a successful testing event and how to meet our end goal of increasing knowledge and awareness of Hepatitis C and liver wellness.

The testing events were successful due to the number of people who were educated on Hepatitis C. Additionally a large percentage of persons tested returned for results and if reactive were given resources for follow-up care. Furthermore Step Up to the Plate against Hepatitis C established new relationships between the community and the Health Department. Part of the evaluation of the program was to assess program effectiveness through participant evaluations. Participants recognized the program’s usefulness and would like to see more Hepatitis C events

Public Health Significance

The two essential public health services closely related to this initiative are to mobilize, investigate, inform, educate, and empower. The target for this program was to promote awareness of Hepatitis C and engage community partners. Baseball fans were provided with education material to recognize risk for Hepatitis C. Furthermore resources were provided for additional information on testing services. Testing at baseball games established a strong presence in the Houston community for health promotion. Major partnerships formed: Houston Astros, Merck, the American Liver Foundation, Coalition on Positive Health Positive Health Empowerment, OraSure technologies, amongst others.
Project Saving Smiles: Parental Involvement

Exploring Parent Involvement Strategies to Achieve Quality Oral Health for At-Risk Children
By: Sohini Dhar

Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS) developed Project Saving Smiles (PSS) to address the problem of childhood caries in Houston. PSS is an evidence and community-based public health intervention. Their first mission was on November of 2008. The goal of the program is to reduce dental caries in at-risk children and to decrease school absences due to dental problems. PSS uses oral health education, application of fluoride varnish, and the application of dental sealants to reduce dental caries. PSS targets 2nd graders who are on the Free and/or Reduced Lunch Program within public schools in Houston. The aim of my practicum was to seek best practices for engaging parents in maintaining and promoting the oral health of their children and also to promote PSS. My primary focus was to motivate the parents to give consent for their child to participate in PSS, and also to teach them to aid their children in maintaining good oral hygiene.

My final deliverables included a survey questionnaire, a flyer, two newsletters, and certificates of appreciation.

Public Health Significance

Inform, educate, and empower: At each PSS mission, the participating children are provided with oral health education. In addition, this year newsletters with information about oral health issues were also sent home with the children as reinforcement.

Mobilize: PSS, in collaboration with Texas Oral Health Coalition – Houston Region, organized “Listening Sessions” within elementary schools. At these sessions parents of the school children were able to express their views, opinions, and experiences with their child’s oral health.

Link: The flyers and the newsletters that were distributed to the schools participating in PSS, contained information on Houston-area dental clinics providing free or low cost treatment.
Healthy Children through Early Education

Special Tasks:

- Conducted activities and explained Video Evaluation during two day teacher training
- Lead activities at city-wide fitness event for 3,000 + children
- Reviewed video footage of parents asking their children about how to take care of themselves

Examples of Answers to Video Evaluation

What do you use your brain for?
Answer: Trouble

What types of exercise are good for your brain?
Answer: Running with my cat

Images show that pre-schoolers can model healthy habits for communities
By Heather Duncan

I developed tools and a process to help gauge if children are learning healthy habits from a pre-school curriculum, the Healthy Education for Youngsters (HEY!) program. I developed questions from the curriculum, wrote instructions for parents and teachers, distributed and evaluated video footage.

On what public health issue/topic did you work?
This project related to health promotion and behavioral sciences.

What was the final product you created for your practicum site?
I wrote a report based on research using images as an evaluation tool. The report included a process outline, forms and documents created for the process and recommendations for continuation.

Public Health Significance

Tell us how your practicum experience related to the Essential Services of Public Health.

My practicum served to inform, educate and empower. The ultimate product was 18 videos of children aged 3-5 years old describing what foods and activities keep them healthy.

These videos can serve as a powerful method to show that children can learn and engage in healthy habits at a young age and serve as models for other children and parents.

HealthStart contributes to public health by engaging pre-school students and their families in learning healthy habits. Most importantly, my project involved interviewing children so they can participate as change agents in their families and communities by setting an example. Many of the children interviewed in the videos showed a high level of understanding of what types of foods they need to eat and what types of exercise keep them healthy.
Clinic-Based Decision Support System to Enhance Self-Management in Epilepsy

By: Angelique Harding

The purpose of my practicum was to assist in the development of a decision-support system (DSS) for managing epilepsy. This included participating in focus groups, developing/editing instruments, and other activities in order to prepare for the pilot study.

The ultimate goal of this DSS is to help the patient and clinician identify issues that may affect their epilepsy self-management behaviors. The data collected from the DSS will then facilitate the discussion of the prominent issues; with the goal of an action plan that enhances the patient’s ability to manage their epilepsy.

The project is still ongoing, however the initial responses received from the focus groups is promising. Additionally a review of the literature demonstrates that such a tool is needed in the clinical management of epilepsy.

Public Health Significance

The DSS system primarily addresses the research aspect of the 10 essential services of public health; with a secondary aspect of educating and empowering the epilepsy patients. Epilepsy has been around for ages; however there is a gap in literature for ways to address self-management, particularly in the clinic setting.

This project combines current computer technology with an innovative, theory-based solution to enhance epilepsy management.

“Public Health services...”

Special events/duties during my practicum

- Focus groups with epilepsy patients
- Assisting in the development of a decision-support system
- Developing instruments

The data collected from the DSS can be rather short and at times we are not able to fully articulate what our issues are. Having a system that prompts a patient to think about those factors can maximize the time spent with their clinician. That effective use of time and attention to their issues can make a difference in their lives.

Kelsey-Seybold Clinic has been a pillar in the Houston area for 6 decades. The primary focus of their research efforts is to “improve the quality of patient care and health outcomes...” This speaks to their commitment to ideals that are at the core of public health services.

Photo from: http://www.genengnews.com/media/images/GENHighlight/Aug25_2010_6761569_ColorfulBrain_Epilepsy9316016759.jpg
Steps to Health is a Social Cognitive Theory based intervention focusing on increasing physical activity in endometrial cancer survivors. The study results show a significant relationship between high self-efficacy reports and daily exercise. To further investigate this relationship, we are pilot testing a smart phone intervention component using smart phones to collect two daily assessments on the participant’s self-efficacy, outcome expectations, social support and daily exercise.

Based on the responses, tailored text messages with tips, ideas and encouragement on how to increase physical activity are sent. The goal is for participants to exercise for 30 minutes at least 5 days a week.

I was responsible for writing the health messages, developing the logic behind their delivery, ensuring smooth implementation, and will be supporting and interviewing the participants.

The pilot is still ongoing.

Public Health Significance

Of the 10 Essential Public Health Services, my practicum focused on:

- Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues
- Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems

Endometrial cancer is the most common gynecologic cancer and 5 year survival rates approach 90%. Obesity and sedentary lifestyle are also risk factors for the disease. These considerations make endometrial cancer survivors excellent candidates for physical activity interventions.

Dr. Basen-Engquist, through this pilot, is trying to find new innovative uses for technology, such as smart phones, in order to make real-time interventions in people’s lives. As older people begin to use technology more, there are greater opportunities for researchers to reach populations at-risk for cancer.

By using daily responses to questions on self-efficacy and outcome expectations, we have a great opportunity to impact that day’s exercise by providing tailored text messages of empowerment and education through tips and ideas. This helps people take control of their own health and cancer management.

References
Fit For Life Reduces Obesity

Community Gym Shown to Decrease Obesity in Rural Community

By: Jenna Kubecka-Sneed

Throughout the practicum, I was educated on the how to use evidence-based program approaches while taking into consideration specific cultural contexts of a small Texas town.

Met with gym instructors, clients, community partner organizations, and local policy makers to learn how the director of Fit for Life effectively works with a variety of environmental layers to positively impact the community with healthy promoting features.

Jenna photographed at a Wellness Weekend

Public Health Significance

Fit For Life “informs and educates” its clients and surrounding community about how to become fit and stay fit through classroom lectures, fitness classes, health challenge competitions, and one-on-one motivation. The director makes sure that she, as well as her entire staff, stays current on the latest fitness and nutrition information, trends, and continuing education training.

My work on worksite wellness programs will only help Julie further her mission, “to spread a passion and access to fitness to everyone regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or spiritual practice.”

Drafted a corporate wellness program presentation that is used throughout the state for obtaining new projects!
Health for Texas Children

Practicum Highlights:

- Beat The Odds Gala – Five high school seniors on their way to college, against all odds, are awarded and celebrated
- Health Literacy Conference – Submitted an abstract for inclusion and created the poster for the session. (See the graphic to the right.)
- CDF-TX 2011 Retreat – Able to see the inner workings of the team and share in their lessons learned.

“...you can’t figure this out – think of the poor mother of four, who speaks English as a second language and the thousands like her who struggle with this every day.”

-- Carolyn DeVaughn, Manager of Outreach, referring to the CHIP and children's Medicaid paperwork

Advocacy and Communication at Children’s Defense Fund
By: Lydia Lowe

Children's Defense Fund Texas (CDF-TX) were looking for interns and helped me to tailor-make a practicum to fit my interests! CDF-TX works to give children in Texas a healthy start at life to give them the best chance for a successful passage to adulthood.

As I want to go public health lobbying, I worked with the Policy Director to gain experience in health advocacy and also with the Communications Director to learn how to reach targeted audiences.

Public Health Significance

From the list of Essential Services of Public Health, my experience at CDF-TX most closely relates to:

"Inform, Educate and Empower people about the health issues.”

One of the biggest problems with child health in Texas is insurance. Sadly, of the state’s approximately 1.2 million uninsured children, 600,000 are eligible for CHIP and Medicaid but are not enrolled. CDF-TX works really hard not only to inform the public of their options but to help them complete the paperwork.

The CDF-TX team organize and run regular sign-up events to get more families the health coverage they desperately need. As part of the team, I had to learn how to help someone fill out the paperwork – how hard could it be? I struggled greatly. The information is overwhelming and very confusing. This few minutes experience in their shoes was a unique and valuable learning curve, and an experience that I will take with me through my public health career.
Overview:
This study aims at identifying staph carriers within the population in order to prevent the spread of community-acquired Staph infections.

Duties:
I enrolled participants, collected biological samples, processed the samples, and did follow-up.

Final Project:
I created an information pamphlet on Staph to be handed out at the clinic.

Highlights:
- I observed and experienced how an effective small clinic for the medically underserved is run and managed
- I got to dress up as a crayon (along with the rest of the clinic staff) for Halloween
- I learned how to collect, culture, and type a S. aureus sample

Public Health Significance:
Staphylococcus aureus is a bacteria frequently found on skin and in the nose. It is estimated that 30% of people are long-term carriers. The S. aureus species is the cause of most Staph infections, it can present as a range of illnesses from pimples or boils to pneumonia or sepsis. Every year almost half a million patients in US hospitals get Staph infections but their prevalence is also on the rise in the community setting.

Photos from:
My practicum experience was with the Houston Department of Health and Human Services STD/HIV/Hepatitis Prevention Bureau. I assisted Tamara Brickham, the HDHHS Adult Viral Hepatitis Coordinator, in the outreach and evaluation of a multi-city Hepatitis C (HCV) testing initiative, “Step up to the Plate”. I participated in 2 of the 3 testing events at Houston Astros games where we promoted rapid HCV testing and education to people attending the games. My duties included assisting participants in completing consent forms and managing participant flow, data entry and registration, and overall program evaluation. Overall, 147 rapid HCV tests were performed. A major success of “Step Up to the Plate” was the collaboration of community organization.

Public Health Significance

Testing for HCV is crucial because symptoms of Hepatitis C may not appear until severe liver damage has already occurred. Of the ten essential public health services, hosting free testing events in the community demonstrates diagnosis and investigation, mobilization, and linkage. An evaluation of the event provides insight and information about the strengths and weaknesses of the collaboration.

A major aspect of Step Up is mobilization. Since HDHHS does not offer confirmatory HCV testing, or treatment, it is imperative to connect people to resources. The health department is in partnership with St. Luke’s Episcopal Hospital and the Texas Liver Coalition to provide that next step in care.

The health department is a cornerstone for public health in Houston; Tamara Brickham, as the sole representative of viral hepatitis, contributes to public health on a daily basis. She has developed partnerships across Houston to strengthen the network of care for Houstonians with HBV and HCV.

Step up to the Plate against Hepatitis C

- I went to 2 Astros games to promote HCV rapid testing
- I got to participate in a boots on the ground public health outreach
- Halfway through my practicum I was offered a job to do Hepatitis C outreach in Texas!
Breastfeeding is proven to aid in growth and development, strengthen an infant’s immune system, and decrease their lifelong susceptibility to many diseases including obesity.

Public Health Significance

Creating a Tool to Evaluate Efficacy of Breastfeeding Teleconsultations

According to the CDC 75% of new mothers initiate breastfeeding when their child is born. Unfortunately, a large number of these women discontinue breastfeeding for a variety of reasons.

The Lactation Foundation is dedicated to providing Houston area mothers on WIC with breastfeeding support and education from a Board Certified Lactation Consultant.

Since traveling with an infant can be inconvenient for some mothers, The Lactation Foundation has developed a form of teleconsultation which allows mothers to communicate electronically with a Lactation Consultant while in their local WIC office.

This new, innovative form of breastfeeding consultation has not previously been evaluated. The Lactation Foundation is very interested in finding out how mothers feel about the teleconsultations and if they are helpful. A breastfeeding assistant now conducts a short, telephone follow-up survey with each patient days after a breastfeeding teleconsultation.

Results from the survey are helping the Foundation improve the quality and efficacy of these consultations. As a result they can continue to provide mothers with the highest level of breastfeeding support.
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/