Public Health Practice

Stories from the Field
The University of Texas School of Public Health
Student Practicum Experiences
Fall 2013 – DrPH/PhD Students
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 twelfth-edition e-magazine showcases student practicum experiences throughout the Fall 2013 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:** 11

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Gaining Real-World Experience

By: MING YANG

During past fall semester I did my practicum at Department of Clinical Effectiveness & Performance Measurement (CEPM) at St. Luke’s health system. Here unlike in the Division of Biostatistics, I get in touch with many real clinical data that we use to analyze and based on which we generate clinical reports. The projects that I participated in are producing STS (The Society of Thoracic Surgeons) physician report, generating transplant performance reports, producing JCC (Joint Committee Conference) report, etc. All these are real-world experiences working with clinical data that I couldn’t have a chance to experience at school.

Public Health Significance Evaluate

The department that I’m working here plays a very important role in monitoring and evaluating the performance of various aspects of the hospitals. We produce not only standard performance report with regard to system hospitals, but also download the data from the national data base and make comparison of hospitals’ performance with other hospitals in the nation.

This gives the hospital leader a clear sense of how well hospitals are doing and which part hospitals have an opportunity for improvement so hospitals can provide better patient care.

Practicum Highlights

- Get involved into daily work with clinical data analysis.
- Be exposed to many clinical terminologies and learnt different methods they analyze and use the data.

Be an expert,
Be professional.

- When assigned to the new position, we should get into the role and pick up the knowledge needed as quickly as possible.
- Make yourself as the real expert in the area you are working on.
- Use the knowledge and skill that you mastered to support and contribute to the work and development of your department.
Environmental Health and Safety

Practicum Highlights

- Surveyed hospitals and research and clinic laboratories regarding radiation, biological, and chemical hazards
- Air and water sampling in hospital settings
- Translation of Radiation and Biological Safety training videos
- Inspection of Small Animal Facility for both Radiation and Biological hazards
- Conducted evaluations and tests of equipment for potentially hazardous conditions

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Start looking for practicum opportunities early
- Be proactive during practicum, it is your experience, nobody has the responsibility to teach you.
- Keep a journal of what you have done

Safety Inspection at MD Anderson Cancer Center

By: Yue Shang

I spent four and a half months with MD Anderson’s Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) Department conducting safety inspection in hospitals, research and clinic laboratories regarding radiation, biological and chemical hazards. 2) I also helped their Occupational Safety group to conduct pharmacy project: air and water sampling. 3) I assisted in training employees in safety issues: I translated one very important training video into Chinese so that Chinese-speaking personnel could have a better understanding on Biosafety and Radiation Safety. EHS department’s main responsibility is to keep everybody at MD Anderson, including patients and their family, employees and contractors safe.

Public Health Significance

Among the ten Essential Services of Public Health, my practicum experience as a safety specialist at EHS Department relate to 1) monitor: I surveyed hospitals and laboratories to identify safety problems and issues; 2) Diagnose and investigate, my duty involved work-related accident investigation; 3) Inform, educate, and empower: I assisted with training employees on safety regulations, I translated two trainings into Chinese; 4) Enforce: I participated in construction site safety inspection in compliance with MD Anderson’s regulations; 5) Assure: a safety specialist’s main duty is to keep everybody at MD Anderson’s wellbeing; 6) Evaluate: one of the purposes of the surveys and inspections I conducted were to evaluate the effectiveness of our safety regulations as well as employees’ understanding of those regulations

Small Animal Imaging Facility
Sexual behaviors of young MSM

Sexual behaviors of young MSM recruited from Facebook
By: Chi Nguyen

Sexual behaviors of young MSM recruited from Facebook
By: Chi Nguyen

For my practicum, I am involved in several projects. One of them was the study that examines the sexual behaviors of young MSM recruited from Facebook and assesses the feasibility of using Facebook to approach this hidden population. The study results are reported on poster in CFAR meeting in November 2-3, Miami.

The study uses ad campaigns to test the performance of ad titles and images for recruiting young MSM into online sexual health survey.

Study participants are males, aged 18 to 25, have an active Facebook account and are men interested in men.

The ad with title “Quick sex survey” with the image above received the most clicks. Over the period of 4 months, 2277 clicked to enter the survey and 1151 completed.

Most men classified them as gay (97%), mean age 22 years, 57% reported some college or higher, 85% self-described as HIV negative, and mostly are Whites (78%). Of 1152 participants completed the survey, 32% engaged in unprotected anal intercourse with their male partner, and 7% reported trade sex. 11% of them reported at least one STI in last year and 23% self described as alcohol dependent.

Public Health Significance

Facebook has changed the way individuals communicate and associate and may provide a platform where young MSM can find support and understanding about their sexuality and risk behaviors.

This study was able to recruit a large number of sexually active young MSM who provided valuable data on their risk behaviors.

The findings suggest that Facebook sample of sexually active young MSM engaging in high-risk sexual activity (UAI, drug & alcohol use). Future research and interventions may consider Facebook as a tool to study and communicate with young MSM.

Through this practicum, I have learned about

• Data management and data cleaning
• Analysis skills including hypothesis testing and logistic regression
• Working collaboratively in a team

Lessons Learned for Future Students

• Always be motivated, creative and hard working.
Chronic illness thwarts survival

Practicum Highlights

- My practicum gave me the chance to practice independent learning, and most importantly, to learn from other fields and areas of expertise.

- Learned how to organize material in a logical way, and how to write a manuscript that is both informative and readable.

- Became knowledgeable about the impact of arthritis among people with cancer.

Impact of comorbidity on cancer mortality: specific effect of rheumatoid arthritis

By Pratibha Nayak

For my practicum, I worked at MD Anderson, examining the impact of rheumatoid arthritis on cancer mortality. Cancer patients with one or more concomitant conditions are more likely to have poor survival than those without comorbidity. Our study indicates that patients with rheumatoid arthritis and cancer have worse survival, independent of the presence of other comorbid conditions.

A multidisciplinary health care team may be needed to improve the survival time of patients with rheumatoid arthritis who develop cancer.

Public health significance

This practicum opportunity generated new insights to address chronic health problems. Using existing population-based datasets is an effective way to address public health challenges. It allows research teams to generate new knowledge, which is of particular importance for disease conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, which has 1% population prevalence.
Families Talking Together

Families Talking Together (FTT): A Parent Based Program to Reduce Sexual Risk Behavior in Early Adolescence

My practicum was based in the Sunnyside community of Houston.

The practicum program is called Families Talking Together (FTT) and is focused on families with teens in early adolescence (11-14 years).

The program is intended to be implemented in spring 2014 and is therefore in the planning process for implementation/evaluation strategies.

The public health issue that the program focuses on is delaying early adolescent sex by increasing communication between parents/guardians and their children.

To address the issue of delaying early adolescent sex, the FTT program is being adapted as it relates to families in the Sunnyside community.

In order to implement the program, a process evaluation plan is needed to monitor the implementation strategies utilized, which is the basis of my practicum experience.

Public Health Significance

My practicum relates to several Essential Services of Public Health because it includes key components of public health practice. Two of the Public Health Essential Service(s) (PHES) that most closely relate to my practicum experience are mobilization and monitoring.

http://www.apha.org/programs/standards/performancestandardprogram/resexsentialservices.htm

The idea behind implementing the FTT program first began with a community wide survey which asked community members about their opinions and concerns about adolescent sexual health in their community. Through this initial survey, community member(s) identified that they needed more skills around communicating with their children about adolescent sexual health topics. As a result, the FTT program was introduced into the community to provide parents/guardians with the necessary communication skills to talk to the children. To accomplish this, mobilization efforts occurred between community members, clinics, school staff, and

“We Can Do More”: Sunnyside Community Meeting

- Highlights from my practicum included interacting with Sunnyside community members at the community meeting to recruit individuals for the FTT program.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Understand that sometimes it is difficult to get participation in project efforts from members in the community. Identifying the right stakeholders is a key element in any successful intervention.

http://www.houstontx.gov/parks/communitycenters/cc-sunnyside.html

The FTT program will be implemented as a part of the We Can Do More (WCDM) project which is an initiative in the Houston community of Sunnyside aimed towards reducing teen pregnancies by providing teens and adults with information, resources, skills and opportunities.

Source: http://www.wecandomore.org/
I worked with Dr. Jacqueline Angel, the chair of the 2013 International Conference on Aging (ICAA) in the Americas, primarily to capture, consolidate, and disseminate the proceedings of this year’s conference. This included two days of research presentations on issues related to Latino aging in the U.S. and Mexico, and a consensus-building session on topics the organization should make its priorities in the year(s) ahead. I managed a cohort of graduate student “rapporteurs” who took notes at each of the sessions. I utilized their summaries to create the final report.

In addition, I also carried out research on two related topics and created one poster and one slide presentation on the results. The poster presentation was titled "The Role of U.S. Migration and Documentation Status on Health in Mexican Males." The second was on "How Health Characteristics of the Aging Population Differ by Insurance Eligibility: A Closer Look at Racial Ethnic Differences Using MEPS." The latter presentation was made by my faculty sponsor Dr. Shelton Brown and we have been invited to submit a paper on the results to a special volume of conference research findings to be published by Springer.

Broad themes addressed by researchers at the conference included:
- Ethnic drivers of the future working-age population in the U.S. and their impact on the economy
- Public and private mechanisms for ensuring retirement security (including intra-household transfers of wealth)
- Living arrangements of the elderly, and
- The intersection of Hispanic aging and health.

**Public Health Significance**

The demographics of both the U.S. and Mexico will go through significant changes over the next 30 to 40 years. This will profoundly impact the demands placed on education, health care, housing and other public services in both countries. Moreover, changes in one country will be felt in the other. The ICAA brings together leading researchers on aging and Latino populations to share study results, exchange ideas and create a shared vision of research gaps and priorities. But the ICAA leadership also recognize the need to get their knowledge out to a broader audience, specifically to political leaders and to the aging Anglo U.S. majority, to influence policy on a wide number of fronts. This is a common theme in public health: those working in the field frequently understand issues much better than those making decisions. That is why Inform, Educate and Empower is one of the 10 Essential Public Health Services. The reports that I created are one step in this effort. Even more exciting, however, is that the organization decided that figuring out how to translate research into policy should be one of its key priorities going forward.

**Practicum Highlights**

- Created two presentations of my research work
- Managed a team of graduate students to document conference proceedings
- Created conference report including a summary of key issues, research themes and recommendations for new directions

**Advice for Future Practicum Students**

Document action plans and to-do’s. Your preceptor is probably extremely busy and your work is a minor part of his/her day. Somebody needs to keep track of the end goal and progress being made toward it. If you do it, you’ll never be lost. And it will save him/her some time, too!
Public Health Significance

The projects I worked on during my practicum relate to the following essential services of public health: diagnose and investigate health problems and health hazards in the community; mobilize community partnerships to identify and solve health problems; develop policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts.

Each project is based on an assessment of the needs of the communities served by UTP Clinics. Community stakeholders were included in this process. Several of the projects also included partnerships with other health organizations within the communities.

Improving population health through delivery system reform

By: ‘Buchi Akpeh

These are exciting times for an intern or staff at the medical group practice of The University of Texas Medical School at Houston, UT Physicians (UTP). The physician group is implementing several projects aimed at transforming their service delivery and improving the health of the communities they serve.

Some of the projects include expanding the primary and specialty care capacity, establishing a medical nurse-line triage call center, and implementing a patient centered medical home care model. Together, all the projects will enhance access and the quality of care received by residents living in areas served by UT Physicians.

Advice for Future Students

• Choose a practicum based on your interests and career goals.
• Discuss goals with your preceptor and faculty sponsor to determine if the practicum will provide the experience you need.
**MEDICAID REFORM in TEXAS**

**Practicum Highlights**

- Training of healthcare providers and project managers on evidence-based care delivery improvement models.
- Designing of projects to improve healthcare access, quality and outcomes for low income populations.

**Healthcare Reform**

**By: CHARLES CHIMA**

I worked as part of team that is planning and overseeing the implementation of the MEDICAID Delivery System Reform Incentive Payments (DSRIP) Program for the UT Physicians practice group. The DSRIP program is a statewide healthcare reform program focused on improving healthcare access and quality, and reducing healthcare costs for the poor and indigent population in Texas.

With regards to this program, UT Physicians is implementing 23 projects, all of which are managed by the project team that I worked with.

During the practicum, my main task was to provide technical support to healthcare providers and project managers to ensure the achievement of process and outcome measures for the DSRIP projects. I facilitated the understanding and adoption of the Wagner's Chronic Care Model and I worked with a consultant to get the practice started on putting measures in place to transition to a medical home.

In addition to the already approved and ongoing projects, I also helped design new projects in line with the DSRIP program. One key project that I passionately contributed to was a project aimed at providing comprehensive maternal and neonatal care to at-risk women in order to improve pregnancy outcomes for women and children in the Houston area. When fully implemented, this project will result in lower rates of unplanned pregnancy, maternal deaths, and preterm births.

**Public Health Significance**

My practicum experience related to many of the Essential Services of Public Health, most especially number 5: Develop policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts, and number 7: Link people to needed personal health services and assure the provision of health care when otherwise unavailable.

There are significant socioeconomic disparities in access to good quality health care in the US. The DSRIP program aims to address some of such disparities.

**Advice for future students**

Doing is one of the best ways to learn. You can take a million classes but some skills like communication and leadership are better learnt in the field.
Human Trafficking

Interning with Houston Rescue and Restore Coalition

By Frances Recknor

My main focus while at HRRC was to take on strategic planning for adapting the Colorado Project to Comprehensively Combat Human Trafficking (CP) to Texas. This is a community based participatory research project engaged in a national study of promising anti-human trafficking efforts. Texas has 5 times the population of Colorado and has a almost twice the population density, thereby necessitating much strategizing to adapt the project. My work entailed research, discussion with the founders of the project, other researchers in Texas looking to implement a similar evaluation, and the Attorney General’s office.

My final product was a report outlining steps taken and recommendations for furthering the project.

Practicum Highlights

Opportunities to work with several key figures in the Texas fight against human trafficking.

Realizing I have found the ‘niche’ in public health I would like to devote myself to.

Public Health Significance

Human trafficking, whether for labor or sexual services, is a multi-faceted problem that can be viewed from the perspective of a vast array of disciplines: criminal justice, law enforcement, migration, homeland security, and social services, to name just a few. From the lens of public health, the violence and psychological impact of human trafficking can exact tolls on both the physical and mental health of victims, which in turn can contribute to the erosion of a community’s social capital. All of the disciplines that I mentioned play a vital role in combating human trafficking. My practicum experience at HRRC focused on laying the foundation for a statewide evaluation of the gaps and strengths of anti-human trafficking initiatives in Texas. As such, it was geared towards implementing the following three Public Health Essential Services:

1) Diagnosing and investigating the public health problem of human trafficking in Texas.

2) Informing, educating and empowering people to combat it.

3) Mobilizing community partnerships to identify and solve the specter of human trafficking in our state.

Lessons Learned / Advice for Future Practicum Students

Be flexible. Organizations are dynamic. Circumstances can change. Be open to change and embrace the new opportunities that can come with it.
What does your BHCT membership mean to you?

By: Jessica Uriarte

The Breast Health Collaborative of Texas is made up of more than 500 members across the state. They partnered with St. Luke’s Episcopal Health Charities to find out more about their members and how they view the collaborative.

My work involved collaboratively creating their initial member survey, which was implemented online. From this survey we did a random sampling of members to interview face-to-face and over the phone.

I worked with a team from UT, SLEHC and Texas A&M to develop interview questions that solicited answers to questions like:

• How do you use your membership?
• What do you think the role of the BHCT is with Breast Cancer in Texas?

The findings were reported to the BHCT.

Public Health Significance

The Breast Health Collaborative of Texas is focused on the Essential Public Health Service of “Mobilizing Community Partnerships”. Their principle focus is on bringing together diverse organizations with the similar goal of improving breast health in Texas. By providing a platform for collaboration the BHCT facilitates mobilization of community partnership.

In my role for this practicum, I was part of a team dedicated to improving relationships of members both with each other and with the Collaborative. By soliciting member feedback on topics like how the collaborative functions and the role of leadership, my practicum experience enabled me to participate in shoring up the vital platform on which community partnerships can flourish.

Practicum Responsibilities

• Creating an implementing an online survey for the BHCT
• Analyzing data from the survey
• Interviewing members in more detail

Advice for Future Students

• When choosing your practicum experience, be sure to select something that will give you new skills you can use in your career - not just skills you gained previously. I loved learning about qualitative research first hand!

Ribbon project for the Breast Health Collaborative of Texas

http://www.breasthealthcollaborativeoftexas.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=2
Improving Outcomes for Cancer Patients

Patient Perceptions and Use of Outcomes and Education Information

By Kimberly Curtin

Through the department of Institute for Cancer Care Innovation at MD Anderson Cancer Center, I participated in a research study funded by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation. The qualitative research study was designed to obtain information from patients that represent 9 cancer types and identify trends regarding health outcomes that were important to them before, during, and after treatment.

During the practicum I completed and participated in the following activities:
1. CITI and Human Subject Protection training.
2. Discussion and revisions of the focus group discussion guide.
3. Co-facilitated focus groups.
4. Reviewed and collected informed consent at the onset of each focus group.

The public health significance for this research study is to gain insight to patient experiences and develop innovative solutions to health related (cancer) problems.

Due to the current state of health reform there is an urgency to shift from physician/healthcare driven decisions regarding the patient but those that include patient and family. In a study that was conducted in 2011 at MD Anderson, the findings demonstrated a disconnect between what health providers think is important and what patients feel is most important regarding outcomes. In order to better understand what outcomes are specifically important to cancer patients, an expanded research study is underway and included the following objectives:

1. Evaluate which outcomes matter to patients with a cancer diagnosis by conducting disease specific focus groups to gain insight.
2. Determine needed enhancements to improve the patient experience of care from the perspective of patients, their caregivers, and their providers.

The final product has not been produced since the focus groups will continue to meet through December 2013 and data analysis will follow.

Highlights during practicum
- Working with others from a variety of non-nursing backgrounds allowed me to see new perspectives and learn about their roles in the research study.
- The synergy of the focus group team promoted safety, support, and cohesiveness.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

If ever given an opportunity to participate in a qualitative research study or facilitate focus groups, please do so. Hearing different perspectives without adding your personal views allows you to listen to what people are actually saying. It is insightful, enlightening, and humbling.

Focus group team (L to R): Robin Soares, Elizabeth Bassett, Kimberly Curtin, Tiffany Jones, Kerri-Anne Parks.
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/