Public Health Practice

Stories from the Field
The University of Texas School of Public Health
Student Practicum Experiences
Fall 2012 – Health Promotion & Behavioral Sciences
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 ninth-edition e-magazine showcases student practicum experiences throughout the Fall 2012 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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By: Alexandra ANDERSON

This semester, I had the privilege to work at the AIDS Foundation Houston on the T.R.U.T.H. Project. This project is an innovative HIV prevention program targeting the GLBTQ community in the Houston area. By the means of the arts, this program aims at healing the African-American GLBTQ community, from issues such as stigma, discrimination, bullying while raising HIV awareness. My duties included being involved in the planning of the 6th and 7th installments of the T.R.U.T.H. Project, as well as developing post-intervention surveys for evaluation purposes. My final project is the development of an evaluation proposal of the 6th installment of the T.R.U.T.H project. The 7th installment of the T.R.U.T.H. Project will be held on 12/1/12, World AIDS day and will be addressing HIV Awareness and Stigma.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience was closely related to several essential public health services. Inform, educate, and empower: this essential public health service has been reflected in the planning and implementation of the T.R.U.T.H Project. Evaluate: my main project consisted of creating post-intervention surveys that were used for the evaluation of the 6th installment of the T.R.U.T.H. Project. This evaluation will be used to assess the effectiveness of the intervention for the community.

Research: The AIDS Foundation Houston is dedicated toward researching and finding innovative solutions to prevent the HIV epidemic in the community. The T.R.U.T.H. project is a perfect example of an innovative program for the prevention of HIV in the community.

Link: one core function of the AIDS Foundation Houston is to link people to appropriate HIV care, support and preventive services.

Practicum Highlights

• The 6th Installment of the T.R.U.T.H. Project was a success and I really enjoyed being part of it!
• Translating theories into practice was really exciting.
• I have been able to understand the workings of a non-profit organization and the intricacies of planning such events.

"Major changes have occurred in the community... A greater sense of community and awareness of HIV, stigma, abuse and discrimination" Kevin Anderson, Education Coordinator, AIDS Foundation Houston

"The T.R.U.T.H Project has increased awareness of HIV in the GLBTQ community and increased compassion of heterosexuals to the issues faced by the GLBTQ community." Nike Blue, Director of Prevention Services, AIDS Foundation Houston.
Practicum Highlights

- A great work environment
- Getting to be a part of a growing non-profit
- Seeing new programs in action
- Working with people who truly care about the population they are serving

Lessons Learned:

Your experience is what you make of it. Some days will be slower, but there’s always something, even if its small that can be done that could make a big difference.

Batters up

By: Whitney Chlon

I interned at RBI Austin for my practicum. RBI Austin is a young non-profit with the mission of rebuilding baseball in East Austin. They serve a lower SES population. With their continued growth, they are seeking to implement a wider range of services, including implementing a health initiative and tracking their impact on the health of their youth participants. I assisted with the research, planning and creation of these new priorities.

I worked on specifically planning programs that would benefit children’s health. RBI Austin seeks to impact their participants not only through baseball but an investment in their participant’s life.

Public Health Significance

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

Mobilize community partnerships to identify and solve health problems.

While at RBI Austin, my main duties included developing policies and plans that support RBI participants and their families. RBI Austin both develops policies and mobilizes partnerships through the management of their leagues and school based programs.

Building RBI Austin’s Health Initiative

- Researching potential partners
- Applying for sponsorships
- Writing a logic model for the implementation of a health plan (Final Product)
- Working with mentors and the after school program to implement nutrition and PA lessons
- Writing surveys for future use to evaluate participants and programs (Final Product)

My own projects and duties specifically were geared towards planning as the next baseball season does not start until spring. I created a logic model to guide development and implementation of future programs.

Most of what I researched and created will be used in the next season and the expansion of their after school and mentoring programs. It was a great experience to be a part of the planning process and really see the work and process that goes into running a non-profit and especially one that is growing with every baseball league they begin.
Corporate Wellness at Apple

Improving the Health of Apple Employees

By: Allison Craver

I worked with Apple’s corporate wellness team on several initiatives aimed at enhancing employee health and well being. For instance, I helped put together monthly employee health seminars. Employees learned about the pros and cons of a vegetarian diet, how laughter can reduce stress, and how to maintain their weight over the holidays.

My main project was the coordination and evaluation of an employee meditation series for stress management. Over four weeks, employees were taught how to incorporate meditation into their daily lives.

The final product I created for Apple was an evaluation report of the meditation program. I am currently compiling the results to determine if the series had an effect on employee stress levels.

Healthy food items prepared for an Apple employee wellness event – kale seaweed salad & veggie lettuce cups. Photo by Allison Craver

Public Health Significance

The Public Health Essential service that most fits my practicum was “Inform, educate, and empower”. The Apple Wellness office does a great job of educating employees on how to improve their health. The monthly health seminars cover a variety of public health topics including nutrition, physical activity, and mental health.

Additionally, they empower employees to improve their health by providing a very low cost fitness center onsite, two onsite dieticians, and a complete primary care clinic. This fall, we are putting on a program to help employees maintain their weight during the holiday season. Through seminars with the dieticians, group exercise events, and weekly weigh-ins, Apple empowers employees to be healthy.

Another example of public health education was the meditation series that I coordinated, which helped to educate employees on ways to manage stress levels at work.

Highlights

- Conducted health assessments of Apple employees including blood pressure, heart rate, and BMI measurement
- Led bi-weekly walks to increase employee physical activity

Lessons Learned

- It is very important to go into your practicum ready to learn. The practical experience of applying what you learn in school is very eye opening. Sometimes things are different in the real world than they seem in a textbook. I learned a lot about applying health behavior theory and the challenges that come with that.

Employees have easy access to Apple’s onsite fitness facilities. Photo by Allison Craver
Technology & Weight Loss

Text Messaging For Weight Loss in Primary Care Patients

By: STACY DAO

Obesity has become an increasingly common health problem around the globe. Obesity is a modifiable risk factor for chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease as well as many cancers. Moreover, counseling needs for obese patients in the primary care settings are largely unmet.

Thus, an ongoing randomized controlled study conducted by Dr. Kevin Hwang at UT Medical School aims to explore whether using technological platforms such as text messages would help adults lose weight.

I serve as a Health Coach in this research study. My main responsibilities include creating an educational text messages library, assisting PCPs in General Medicine Clinics on how to fill out patient recruitment forms, and responding to daily text messages from participants in the intervention group.

Public Health Significance

The Public Health Essential Service(s) most related to this practicum is primarily research and secondarily inform, educate and empower.

Being that this practicum is a randomized controlled clinical trial, it embodies the process of research in public health. Its primarily purpose is to provide supported data to further help improve the health of the general population at large. Specifically, it will be able to provide information on whether text messaging will help support adults lose weight.

Its secondary function is within the study components. All participants involved in the study, whether in the control or intervention group will be given informed educational materials. Empowerment to lose weight will be provided to those in the intervention group with direct interaction and feedback from a Health Coach.

Results from this ongoing study will serve to benefit the field of Public Health greatly.

Practicum Highlights:

- Learning the process of a randomized controlled research study through hands on tasks and experiences.
- Being able to witness and facilitate the collaborative process between Medicine and Public Health to improve the health of the general population.

Lessons Learned

- Learning is a never-ending process; the more you allow yourself to be challenged, the richer the experience will be.

Photo Courtesy of Stacy Dao
The Native American IYG

The project is about the Native American youth about healthy relationship

- For my practicum, I am involved in disseminating a computer-based comprehensive program named “The native...It’s Your Game” (IYG) to the Native American youth.
- The IYG program is an effective way to teach teens about their bodies, personal relationship, personal rules, and sex while providing necessary skills to grow into responsible adults.
- My main responsibility is to develop a computer game based curriculum for the Native American youth.
- The project site is the Center for Health Promotion and Prevention Research (CHPPR) at the University of Texas School of Public Health.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience related to Inform, educate, and empower the Native American youth about healthy relationships and personal rules that help them maintain healthy relationship.

This project will:
- Address the need for HIV/STI and pregnancy prevention intervention for AI/AN youth who represent an at-risk and underserved population.
- Provide Native American parents and teens valuable information to keep the communities healthy and strong.

Through my practicum, I have learned about

- The importance in using technology for changing human behaviors.
- Leadership skills

Lessons Learned for Future Practicum Students

- Always be motivated, participatory, friendly, helpful, and supportive.

Native American Youth
http://www.cherokeephoenix.org/Article/Index/6142

Native American Youth
http://www2.nau.edu/gradcol/enews/2008September/Watch.html
Integrative Medical Approaches to Cancer

A qualitative approach to understanding the lived experience of lymphoma

My practicum was with the Integrative Medicine Program (IMP) at MD Anderson in the Mind/Body department. Integrative medicine is informed by evidence and combines conventional medical practices with complementary therapies – e.g. yoga, meditation, acupuncture, herbal remedies - restores the primacy of the patient/physician relationship, focuses on the whole person, and empowers patients to take an active role in their own care, offering comprehensive treatment for health and well-being. The IPM focuses on cancer prevention, treatment, management of symptoms and side effects, and survivorship to optimize health outcomes. The mind/body division offers mind/body practices and conducts clinical research on their possible effects on patient’s emotional, spiritual and physical well-being.

My main project was to conduct an analysis of qualitative data collected for a Tibetan Yoga (TY) intervention for lymphoma patients. Under mentorship, I analyzed the qualitative data, interpreted and wrote up the findings for submission to a peer-reviewed journal. This research contributes to an understanding of the lived experience of lymphoma and informs the development of interventions focused on meeting the needs of these patients. I also researched and contributed to the contents of a web-page on meditation.

Public Health Significance

To Inform, Educate and Empower

My principal assignments, assisting with the contents of a web-page on meditation, and my involvement in the TY intervention, both serve to inform, educate and empower patients to actively engage in their own healthcare. Participants in the yoga intervention reported benefits from this practice and its continuation. The IMP is involved in ongoing education and empowerment of staff, patients, and healthcare providers through its various integrative medicine trainings and clinical practices.

To Research New Insights and Innovative Solutions to Health Problems

The TY and other interventions conducted at the IMP, contribute to a growing body of research in integrative medicine that approaches healthcare from a new perspective - one that recognizes the need to treat the whole person and the physical, psychological, social and spiritual aspects of cancer. With more than half of Americans turning to complementary or alternative medicine for their healthcare needs1, research in integrative medicine is essential to public health.

Key duties:
- Researched and contributed to the contents of a web-page on meditation for the Mind/Body division of the Integrative Medicine Program.
- Analyzed qualitative data from a Tibetan Yoga intervention for lymphoma patients.
- Interpreted and wrote up findings for publication in peer-reviewed journal.

Advice for Future Students

- Expand your learning by attending lectures and events offered by your practicum organization and by lending a hand in projects other than your own.

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Music therapist in a group session with children (Photo courtesy of MD Anderson http://www.mdanderson.org)
A campaign addressing the issue of stigma towards HIV

By: Emily Locke

While working with LIVE Consortium I spent a majority of my time planning and administrating the month-long University Anti-Stigma campaign. The rational behind this particular campaign is to educate college students about stigma towards HIV, the negative affects of stigma and how reducing stigma can reduce the spread of HIV. The campaign this semester took place at Texas Southern University.

Part of planning the campaign included working with TSU faculty and administration. Throughout the campaign, we hung up posters and handed out fliers with anti-stigma messages and promoted the Anti-Stigma Day event. We also talked to students in order to gain support, recruit volunteers and get our message out.

We administrated pre and post surveys among student in order evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign. We are considering attempting the campaign again at TSU in order to address the lessons learned in order to have a more successful campaign.

Special events/duties/highlights during your practicum

- Talking to students and gaining their support for the campaign
- Successfully pulling off the Anti-Stigma Day event after encountering many challenges

Lessons Learned for Future Campaigns

Start having a presence on campus at least 4 to 6 months prior to the projected start date of the campaign

Recruit at least one student at that school as an intern or to be on the planning board

Depending on campus culture, a media campaign may not be effective and other means are needed to get the messages of the campaign across to students

Gaining student support is a key to the success of this campaign so using opinion leaders should be considered

Social media sites maybe appropriate means to promote an event but is not as effective at spreading the educational components of the campaign

Develop a logic model, identify the constructs of the program, stick to a curriculum and modify the survey to use the Likert Scale for all the questions.

Lessons Learned

for Future Campaigns

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Develop a logic model, identify the constructs of the program, stick to a curriculum and modify the survey to use the Likert Scale for all the questions.

Public Health Significance

The whole basis of the anti-stigma campaign was to inform, educate and empower students about the stigma attached to HIV. We inform them on how stigma is made up of denial, complacency, ignorance and fear. Then we strive to educate and empower them to reduce stigma through knowledge, acceptance, communication and action. We encouraged students to talk openly about HIV to friends and family, know the statistics about HIV in their community, understand the risk involved in certain behaviors and to get tested. At the Anti-Stigma event we even able to link students with testing and HIV counseling by inviting Montrose Counseling Center to have a table at the event. Many students got HIV tested right at the event.

Another public health service my practicum offered was to evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign through administrating pre and post surveys on campus. I was able to identify a few weaknesses of the program through the challenges and problems we encountered on this campus. The statistical findings from the data collected and lessons learned will be used for research in order to offer others knowledge on how to address HIV stigma among today’s young people.
Public Health Significance

One of the important criteria in the Public Health Essential Service(s) (PHES) is to provide the public with resources and program to ensure better health.

In the seven Texas counties in Region 6, there is a great need for dental health services. The statistics indicate that at least 10 percent of populations in those counties live below the poverty line. Dental caries is one of the most common chronic childhood diseases in the U.S. that could easily be prevented by maintaining good oral hygiene. There are community clinics available in the counties to help the low SES population with medical services, but however not all provide the essential oral health services.

Therefore, with the data analysis on the number of dental services available in Region 6 can help enable the Texas DSHS to provide better access to dental care for residents in the seven counties.

Develop workforce analysis of dental services in 7 counties surrounding Harris County

By: Noen Nguyen

The goal of my practicum is to develop a workforce analysis of existing dental healthcare resources for the seven counties in Region 6 without local health departments. The seven counties surrounding the Houston area are Liberty, Walker, Waller, Austin, Colorado, Wharton, and Matagorda Counties.

My practicum entails doing community need assessments through data collection of the dental services provided in the seven counties.

Since the data collection requires mostly online research, I look up information on the availability of the dental services in those counties. When I couldn’t find the information online, I had to call the local dental offices to ask them for information.

From the data analysis I collected which includes the number of dentists and type of Medicaid/CHIP providers, the Texas DSHS will be able to use to determine the needs for dental services in Region 6 and provide a directory list for future patients.

Special events/duties during your practicum

- Data analysis collection on (1) Number of dental hygienists and dentists per county and locations, (2) Number of dental Medicaid and CHIP providers compared to number of Medicaid enrollment eligibility per county

"From the data analysis I collected […] the Texas DSHS will be able to use to determine the needs for dental services in Region 6 and provide a directory list for future patients."
Preventing the Onset of Perinatal Depression

By: Carmen Elisa Ochoa

I was a summer research assistant at Georgetown University Center for Human and Child Development (GUCHCD).

I worked under the supervision of Dr. Deborah Perry, an associate professor, who conducts research on Perinatal Depression among low-income women in Washington D.C.

In the U.S., Perinatal Depression is the most common disease during the prenatal and postpartum period. Perinatal Depression has devastating effects on the U.S. economy, women’s health and children’s development.

I developed and mailed a policy brief with policy recommendations to Texas Senators and Texas State Representatives. In addition, I conducted a cost analysis for the Mothers & Babies Project, a prevention intervention for Perinatal Depression in Washington D.C.

According to research, environmental barriers (interpersonal, organizational, community and societal) prevent low-income women from obtaining appropriate mental health services.

Georgetown University Center for Human & Child Development (GUCHCD) influences Public Health by providing information to State leaders on how to manage maternal and child health programs. In addition, GUCHCD provides training to health professionals and organizations who work with children and adults with disabilities.

My policy brief has the potential to influence Medicaid, organizations, and community policies that could increase access to Perinatal Depression services among low-income women.

Public Health Significance

The Public Health Essential Service(s) (PHES) that most closely relate to my practicum experience are (1) Inform, educate, and empower, (2) Mobilize, (3) Develop policies and plans, (4) Assure, and (5) Research.

My policy brief accomplishes the 1st three Public Health Essential Service(s) listed above. Additionally, the GUCHCD addresses the PHES(s) of Assurance and Research by providing training to health professionals and by conducting prevention research on various diseases.

In 2020, Depression will be the leading cause of disability among women and children (WHO).
Corporate Wellness and Workplace Healthcare

The Growth of Corporate Wellness

By: Nimish Paripatyadar

My practicum experience primarily consisted of assisting the Integrated Health Solutions, Inc. (IHS) team with various activities planned. This team focused on delivering various healthcare services to BP employees on-site in order to improve their overall health.

The main activities involved the administration of healthcare events to BP employees around the campus, but I also assisted in developing nutritional fact sheets that looked at common facts and myths among nutritional products. The wellness team also provided recipes, healthy food (fruit, vegetables, yogurt), and even games such as crossword puzzles for stress reduction.

Public Health Significance

Integrated Health Solutions, Inc. (IHS) is a private company primarily focused on the following Essential Public Health services: Assurance and Empowerment.

These were accomplished through several types of events:

• Lunch-and-Learn: These events were administered to BP employees during lunch, and covered topics such as nutrition, healthcare strategies, and quality-of-life tips.
• Relax, Restore, and Reboot (RRR) Healthcare Events: These consisted of the administration of various health stations to BP employees; these stations consisted of a multitude of topics such as stress reduction, physical activity, supplementation, nutrition, and more.
• Nutrition Counseling from certified Registered Dieticians

The IHS wellness team strove to provide BP employees with on-site healthcare services so they could empower themselves to make better choices in the future.

Highlights from the Practicum

• Experiencing a webinar from Corporate Wellness leaders nationwide
• Participating in wellness events administered by IHS, and seeing the positive effect they had on BP employees in a number of ways (health, stress, knowledge, etc.)

I took responsibility of certain health stations and become comfortable explaining them to employees as the practicum progressed.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

Take time to learn about each practicum opportunity before committing—choosing one where you are invested and excited about the work will make the experience better!
Healthy Mothers and Healthy Babies

Evaluation of the KEEP project for WIC clients

By: Shehla Sadruddin

Over the summer, I was privileged to secure a practicum position with WIC at the Texas Department of State Health Services. WIC is a supplemental nutrition program for low income women, infants, and children.

I was in charge of generating an evaluation report for the KEEP program. KEEP program is geared towards improving health status for high risk women who have recently delivered a preterm and/or low birth weight baby or have experienced 2 or more miscarriages.

I developed an evaluation report by compiling client information into database and generate data specific reports and graphs/charts for the KEEP program. In addition, I was also responsible for identifying key factors and evaluation objectives necessary in developing a comprehensive evaluation report for the KEEP program.

This report was submitted to March of Dimes for review for grant renewal (which was accepted). Financial stress was the major underlying factor for miscarriages and premature births among low income women.

One of my main duties was to evaluate the effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of the KEEP program which was geared towards low income women. The objective of this program is for these women to have a healthy pregnancy and deliver healthy babies. This prevention effort is done by educating and informing women of healthy eating and healthy lifestyles during pregnancy to prevent miscarriages and premature birth.

Public Health Significance

Through the evaluation report, I diagnosed and investigated the physical, social, and psychological health problems and health hazards in the communities of KEEP participants. The participants of the KEEP program provided us with detailed answers of their nutrient intake, life at home and outside of home. All these answers were taken in account for identifying risk factors.

Practicum Highlights

- WIC participated in a baby shower in collaboration with WTL outside of mattress firm in Katy, which was recorded by channel 39 and I was fortunate to be part of it.
- I was privileged to be part of the breastfeeding celebration month at WIC

Advice for Future Students

- Work hard and put all your effort when conducting your duties at your practicum site and you may gain yourself a job position there.

Practicum Experience at AIDS Foundation Houston

By: Kayleigh Sullivan

I completed my practicum at AIDS Foundation Houston in the public health area of HIV/AIDS. I worked alongside the prevention team focused mostly on sexual education and testing. I worked mainly on two of their projects: Hip Hop for HIV Awareness and The T.R.U.T.H. Project.

Hip Hop for HIV Awareness is an annual mass testing event for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. I guided program participants throughout the Hip Hop for HIV Awareness program and answered any questions or concerns they had.

My main project at AIDS Foundation Houston was an evaluation of The T.R.U.T.H. Project. I created surveys, input and analyzed data. The T.R.U.T.H. Project has had several installments. A survey was given to participants at each installment. I analyzed results of past surveys and created surveys for future installations. Through the course of my practicum experience, I shifted the survey style from an open-ended question format, to a multiple-choice question format. This shift will allow survey results to be more measurable.

Beyond creating and analyzing surveys, I assisted the prevention team with research to prepare for their future community mobilization project.

The prevention team at AIDS Foundation Houston provides HIV testing and sexual education. They go further to link HIV positive clients to care.

Lessons Learned [OR] Advice for Future Practicum Students

It is critical to maintain constant contact with your community preceptor. Discuss the status of your project weekly.
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/