Public Health Practice

Stories from the Field
The University of Texas School of Public Health
Student Practicum Experiences
Fall 2012 - International
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: 4

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### International Practicum Experiences

#### AFRICA

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Disability Prevention among Destitute Women and Children of Ethiopia

Disability Prevention through Integrated Maternal and Child Health Services

By: Elsa Bahiru

I had the privilege of working in my country of origin, Ethiopia with a Community Based Organization that is established to improve the health of destitute mothers and children by reducing maternal and child morbidity and disability. According to WHO, an estimated number of 7 million people live with disability accounting for 10% of the total population. One reason that leads to disability is lack of maternal and child health related services. To address this issue, Cheshire Foundation provides integrated maternal and child health services in its project area which contains activities such as family planning, antenatal care, immunization, health education and PMTCT. During my practicum, I was tasked with health promotion activities. My duties included conducting health education to community women and families. My final product included preparing educational material on PMTCT and Nutrition needed during pregnancy.

Public Health Significance

The Essential Service of Public Health that fits my project is informing, educating and empowering community members about health issues including reproductive health, Family planning, PMTCT and nutrition. The antenatal clinic provides maternal and child health services including provision of contraception and voluntary counseling and testing for HIV. The organization conducts health education activities to raise awareness about HIV/STI, and promotes reproductive health. For example, through the community wide health fair I organized, community members were aware of MCH services available to them. They were informed and empowered to access antenatal and reproductive health services and they were educated on proper nutrition during pregnancy. The integrated MCH services provided by the organization significantly contributes to the effort taken to prevent disability among the most vulnerable-women and children of Ethiopia.

Reference:
OB Emergencies Training in Kyrgyzstan

By: Ted Held

I was hired by USAID and its subcontractor, ABT associates, to develop and implement a “train-the-trainer” curriculum for providers of obstetric care in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan has the worst maternal mortality rate, 71/100,000 births, in the former Soviet Union and Asia.

I developed a training model based loosely on the American Advanced Life Support in Obstetrics, in which didactic material is reinforced with mannequin simulations and mock emergencies. The course was adapted to use readily available Kyrgyz medications, protocols, and procedures. Local assistance was used to translate my materials into Russian, and simultaneous translators were used for me to train the locally selected providers, who were taught the developed material and then proctored as they taught their first student cohort the emergency curriculum.

Highlights!

1. I enjoyed learning local dogma around OB care, which is just as lacking in an evidence base as US care!
2. I enjoyed teaching a group of students who were interested and anxious to learn.

Public Health Significance

My project intersected with the essential public health service of assuring a competent public and personal healthcare workforce. In Kyrgyzstan, since the fall of the Soviet Union, there is no real medical education infrastructure. Medical school lasts 2 years, and residency training is one year mandatory. Due to this, the general knowledge of physicians and midwives in the region is marginal. Additionally, high tech treatments are absent, and even basic treatments, such as oxygen, are present only haphazardly. The picture at the right is the most advanced maternity hospital in the country- note the broken windows.

My curriculum consisted of training providers on the basic physiology and management of conditions including hypertension in pregnancy, post-partum hemorrhage, and breech delivery. These conditions lead to much of the morbidity and mortality among pregnant women in the region, and (especially with hemorrhage and breech delivery) can be treated without expensive medicines.

The selected providers were considered the “elite” providers from each region of the country, and were selected to train their colleagues in their selected regions.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

When working internationally, meet the local system where it is, rather than where you think it should be. Also, although it is important to be culturally sensitive, when in Kyrgyzstan do not drink the fermented mare’s milk, no matter how much you are pressured.
The different hats I wore:

As a Medical Assistant checking patients’ vitals and shadowing physician diagnosis

As a Dental Hygienist, preparing numbing injections and assisting with fillings and extractions

As an Optometry Assistant dilating patients, administering eye exams, and distributing eye glasses.

As a Pharmacy Assistant, dispatching medications

Even as a construction contractor addressing infrastructure needs and installing pipes for plumbing!

By the end of the 2 weeks, we had running showers, exponentially improved medical Spanish vocabulary, and built life-long friendships!

The goal of my project was to better understand the gap between the self-diagnosis of the patient, the diagnosis of the patient by the doctor, and then the patient’s understanding of the doctor’s diagnosis and preventative and post care instructions. In addition to learning the significant space that exists between these understandings, we were better able to community with patients by applying what we learned immediately at the community center.

The process for data collection included interviews both pre and post physician interaction to understand what the patient thinks and/or understands may be the reason for their visit. By understanding this, we were also able to educate the community in disease prevention efforts and to routinely visit the community for medical check-ups. Not only did I provide a report on my findings, I helped to create a database for ongoing patient monitoring.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience relates most to the category of informing, educating, and empowering people about health issues as outlined in the Essential Services of Public Health. Along with the Baylor Medical Students, I led group seminars to the mid-wives of the community on the topic of prevention of STD’s, what they are and how to have a safe delivery and prevent passage of the STD from mother to child. Other topics included nutrition, and blood pressure monitoring during a pregnancy.

Shoulder to Shoulder serves the poor in rural Honduras and seeks to create an integrated healthcare system providing primary care physician access within a one hour walk and specialty services within a one hour drive. Long-term relationships lay a foundation for continuity of care, health promotion, disease prevention, health education, public health issues, family planning and reproductive health, nutrition, economic development, agricultural development, improvement in schools and many other activities that impact the health of the poor.
Public Health in the 21st Century

Comparing the public health functions among three developed, westernized countries

By: Joshua N. Cone

While meeting with health system professionals of different talents and levels within each country, we engaged them in discussions and learnings about their health system, how it is funded, how healthcare is provided, and some of the benefits and drawbacks.

Of particular interest during this process were the public health efforts as they relate to the goals of the World Health Organization. Specifically, how Australia, New Zealand, and the United States prioritize their public health initiatives, how they fund them, and what role, if any, do the goals of the WHO play in determining those initiatives?

After multiple interviews and thorough research, I completed a 25-page summary comparison of these three nations’ public health efforts and the process that determines on what the country will focus.

Public Health Significance

Due to the plethora of organizations we visited, each of them contribute to what we would consider the 10 Essential Public Health Services.

From a purely public health perspective, it seems that all of these countries tend to rely on the local level to promote public health issues, thus the combined activities of informing, educating, and empowering are the most significant service in which all of the organizations actively contribute.

Due to the nature of the nationalized health systems in New Zealand and Australia, it is in every stakeholder’s interest to prevent health expenses and make smarter health decisions. So, at each level of interaction, from policy to practice, the efforts to inform, educate, and empower are prominent.

Interestingly, in these countries, the health efforts seem to be much more coordinated than those of the U.S. and performed in a much more cooperative spirit.

Culture and experience beyond public health

- Cultural immersion and education through a tour at the Te Papa Museum in Wellington, New Zealand
- Tour of Sydney Opera House and walk through parks and historical district.

“By failing to prepare, we prepare to fail”

- Benjamin Franklin

- It is important to truly understand the expected outcome of a practicum in order to adequately prepare questions and contingencies for things that don’t go as planned.

Summer 2012 • Joshua N. Cone • Wellington, NZ/Sydney, NSW, Australia • Public Health Initiatives
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/