Stories from the Field
The University of Texas School of Public Health
Student Practicum Experiences
Fall 2012 – 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 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: 16

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**Management, Policy & Community Health**

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Public Health Significance

I believe that the major public health essential services that my practicum included were monitoring health and conducting research. By conducting these surveys and gathering data over a period of 3 years has given us the ability to identify key community health problems, specifically those associated with adolescents and Dating behaviors. Give us specific examples from your own project as well as how your host organization contributes to public health. Also, through analyzing this data and comparing a diverse range of variables we would be able to provide important information regarding the root causes and risks/protective factors associated with Dating Practices.

Adolescent Health: “Dating it Safe”

By: Swathi Anantha

During my practicum I was able to administer surveys, manage data, and do a preliminary analysis of data in a longitudinal study on teen dating violence (“Dating it Safe). This survey encompasses a range of adolescent behaviors and mental health: dating violence, risky sex, sexting, drugs/alcohol, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, parental violence, peer violence, and bullying are a few of the included variables. I was able to present my insights at a meeting with cross disciplinary collaborators utilizing variables from this study. Through individual meetings with my supervisor Ms. Vi Le and the lead investigator, Dr. Jeff Temple I was better able to understand why specific measurements and scales were used and what improvements can be made for future surveys.

Skill Development

- On site survey administration provides better insight into environmental factors
- Data analysis is more productive with diverse perspectives

Lessons Learned

- As I was entering data from hundreds of surveys they were simply numbers but once I saw the faces while administering the surveys my work became more meaningful and purposeful.
- Building trust with adolescents can give us more information than surveys

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My Safety-net Health Policy Internship Experience

By: Charles Chima

I worked as an intern at the Center for Health Care Management of UTSPH on a project for UT Physicians that involved community needs assessment, project designing and planning for the Medicaid Delivery System Reform Incentive Payments (DSRIP) Program. DSRIP is a health care reform program currently being implemented all over Texas and overseen by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission and the Centers for Medicaid & Medicare Services (CMS).

I conducted literature reviews on evidence-based health reform projects, read and digested the DSRIP program protocol and worked with my preceptor to develop project worksheets as well design new projects for the UT Physicians practice group in accordance with the DSRIP project menu and the needs identified in the community health needs assessment.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience related in many ways to the Essential Services of Public Health especially the following ones:

- Diagnose and investigate health problems and health hazards in the community
- Develop policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts
- Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems.

UT Physicians provide state-of-the-art medical services to a large patient base in Harris and Fort Bend County, through its clinics in the Texas Medical Center and a couple of outlying clinics. Through the DSRIP program it aims to implement a series of ‘public-health-type’ preventive medicine projects that aim to keep patients healthy for as long as possible thereby avoiding unnecessary need for hospitalization or usage of the emergency room.
Employee Wellness at UT Austin

Championing a healthy lifestyle within the workplace

By: Jen Cosman

I started my practicum in May, and will continue to work in Human Resources at UT Austin, with the Wellness coordinator.

Wellness as a concept includes achieving a work/life balance, education, action, and utilizing appropriate resources.

I was involved with implementing health screenings, Mammogram mixers, various presentations, benchmarking research from other institutions, and the campus Farm to Work Program.

Our goal is to continually provide opportunities for faculty and staff to improve their overall wellness, and to promote a culture of wellness overall.

While there is no one overall product, I compiled research about healthy vending machines, created some promotional blood pressure literature, and am currently developing a proposal for more healthy dining options on campus.

Highlights:

• The kickoff of our Farm to Work program on Pickle Research Campus, and Main Campus
• A successful series of Wellness Screenings from Wellness, Inc.
• A proposal to Parking and Transportation highlighting the need for more Healthy Vending Machines on campus.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

• Your practicum is just that - YOUR practicum. Use your creativity, follow your interests, change your course of action and learn something new. It is a perfect opportunity to be outside the box!

Public Health Significance

There are many essential services of public health that can be addressed in the workforce. At the Employee Wellness program we seek to Develop policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts.

Healthy Dining Workgroup: A cohort of like-minded individuals on campus dedicated to the enhancement of dining services, including a greater variety of healthy options. Open to anyone on campus, with representatives from student council, Human Resources, Kinesiology, the College of Pharmacy, and so on.

Blood Pressure Machines: Using a grant from the city, we were able to install two stationary Blood Pressure machines on campus, allowing employees to monitor their own basic health on a regular basis.

Farm to Work: Through the Sustainable Food Center, with help from a city grant, we have implemented a Farm to Work Program at both Pickle Research Campus, and on Main Campus. Available to select departments, the program offers the opportunity to purchase fresh produce on a weekly basis to be picked up at a central campus location.

Bites of Wellness/ Special Presentations: Talks and lectures on such subjects as self-compassion and emotional eating.

https://farmtowork.org/UT_Austin/Pickle/

Farm to Work: The Sustainable Food Center helped us implement an awesome food delivery system both at PRC and Main Campus. Employees now get fresh, seasonal produce delivered to them at work for pickup once a week. They can see what is available before ordering, and browse recipes utilizing weekly offerings.
Middle school abstinence-plus program

Practicum Highlights

- Data collection for 7th graders in 20 middle schools of Harris County.
- In-class computer-based surveys to evaluate youth knowledge of sex education, Parent communications, Pregnancy and STD’s.

Lessons Learned

Working under an IRB teaches you how to deal with vulnerable population.

Teamwork cooperation is essential to carry out complex tasks of Data collection.

Evaluation of Sex education knowledge in Harris County Middle schools.

By: Aladdin Hosa.

Through my public health practicum, I was able to experience public health organizations interactions to deliver variant public health services.

Who: 7th graders in 20 middle schools of Harris County.

What: Sex education Knowledge.

Why: Evaluate and develop better curriculum for better future.

When: Fall 2012.

Where: In class during school hours in coordination with PE Department.

How: Via Laptops to ensure confidentiality.

Responsibilities: Data collection and following up Parent consent and conduct vocal consent.

Final product: above 90% parent consent return rate.

Public Health Significance

The University Of Texas Prevention Research Center At The University Of Texas Health Science Center does a lot of community engagement efforts to reduce teenage pregnancy since Texas has the third highest teenage pregnancy nationwide. It’s your game keep it real study is an evidence based program shown to be effective in other states.

The Study covers the following essential public health services:

- Mobilizing Community Partnerships for effective sexual health education.
- Monitoring teenage sexual behavior.
- Ensuring IRB protocol throughout the program.
Comprehensive Health Care Management for Veterans

The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center serves as the primary health care provider for almost 130,000 Veterans in southeast Texas.

Public Health Significance

The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (VAMC) provides comprehensive, cost effective, equitable, and efficient diagnostic, primary, preventive, and specialty healthcare to the southeast Texas Veteran Community. The VAMC specializes in spinal cord injury, neurosurgery, rehabilitation, organ transplant, prosthetics, cancer care, palliative care, and mental health. The VA Medical Center monitors and links their Veteran healthcare using an extensive electronic medical record allowing seamless continuity of care from Primary Care-Patient Aligned Care Teams in a network of Community Based Outpatient Clinics to specialty care at the VA Medical Center. The VAMC leverages community relationships with 144 affiliate institutions of higher learning in 19 states, including the Baylor College of Medicine to provide clinical training and research opportunities to augment healthcare expertise and services for Veterans.

Veterans Health Administration Internship

By: Steven D Hunte

As an Administrative Intern in the Executive Office, I observed the strategic senior level operations of the Executive Staff on a daily basis as they managed one of the largest flagship VA Medical Centers. I learned the VHA administrative processes, clinical care line operations, systems, health care management, budget planning, human resource hiring, orientation, and training, as well as VHA policies and culture. I observed and participated in new comer’s staff orientation and all required training, clinical, nursing, and administrative rotations, budget planning for strategic initiatives, South Central VA Health Care Network video-teleconferences, congressional briefings, executive meetings with staff and Veteran groups. Finally, I worked on multiple Rapid Performance Improvement teams conducting surveys, collecting/analyzing data, while using Lean Six Sigma processes to improve integration/coordination of clinical and administrative processes.

Highlights:
- Senior Executive Strategic Perspective & Metrics
- Individual Clinic and Patient Aligned Care Team Perspective & Processes
- Complex Integration of Clinical & Administrative Systems & Dynamics
- Lean Six Sigma/Rapid Performance Improvement Team Projects
- Quality Management

Lessons Learned
- Enhanced passion for Veteran care
- Focused on Veteran centered healthcare
- Strive for Excellence
- Complex problems require diverse teams with different perspectives and skills
- Strive for improvement of processes
- Always follow-up until fixed

Value Stream Mapping is a Lean Six Sigma method of diagramming patient or process flow through a given area to identify and eliminate sources of waste and delay. Clinical and administrative staff work as a team to improve patient flow processes.
Growing Green through Gardening

Urban Harvest grows Healthy Kids

By: Safia Hussain

Urban Harvest, a Houston non-profit, aims to improve the eating habits of youth and adults through building community gardens in schools and neighborhoods. The organization hosts weekly farmer markets at City Hall, Eastside, and Highland Village. Garden educators and Urban Harvest staff coordinate and teach lessons on building, maintaining, and preparation of plants in urban schools and community centers.

The organization tackles obesity by promoting a hands-on approach to healthy eating. Teaching both youth and adults on how to grow vegetables to eat is fundamental to everyday life. Knowing where your foods come is the first step to a healthy lifestyle. After all, you are what you eat.

As an intern, I participated in the weekly markets educating myself and others about local foods and growers. I also participated in the youth gardening by assisting the class educator teach elementary students the basics of how to grow a vegetable garden.

Practicum Highlights

- Food Day October 18th
- Harvest Celebration at Whole Foods
- Citrus Festival

Lessons Learned [OR] Advice for Future Students

Be ready to answer any question and learn many more answers by asking your own questions at Urban Harvest.

Public Health Significance

A practicum experience at Urban Harvest relates to the Essential Services of Public Health. It meets the third service:

“Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues.”

Inform

At the Urban Harvest Eastside market, volunteers inform shoppers about new local vendors and availability of foods. As an intern, I answer questions about types of gardening and availability of classes.

Educate

Youth Gardening Director Carol Burton coordinates and plans the curriculum for the garden classes of the various schools. I assisted in teaching students about how to plant seedlings, transplants, and weed a garden. The youth gardening effort can be seen as a Prezi for Rusk School available on prezi.com.

Empower

Urban Harvest provides education and hands on training empowering individuals to make lifestyle change.

The new 5’ x 13’ bed built by parents, children, and Urban Harvest volunteers, such as UTSPH intern Safia Hussain, at Rusk Elementary.

. Photo Courtesy of Safia Hussain.
Hospital Quality Management through Quality Services and Hospital Informatics Management

By: Yuanyuan Li

Thanks to my community preceptor, I have a chance to rotate in two departments in St. Luke’s Quality Management, Quality Excellence Service and Clinical Effectiveness and Performance Measurement Department.

In the Quality Excellence Service department, I participated in the Quality Summit which surveyed and audited hospital quality. I also prepared the Transfer Summit which focused on promoting process improvement.

Meanwhile, I was involved in small projects, like creating a CMS Core Measures Discharge Form and Process Improvement place mat.

Then, in the Clinical Effectiveness and Performance Measurement Department, I was responsible for documenting test procedures of Meaningful Use Cases for the Electronic Health Record (EHR) System in the St Luke’s – Patient Medical Center.

I contacted the IT director, set up meetings and visited the center several times to conduct the documentation. After I finished the training, I tested the meaningful use cases in their EHR, documented results and organized the files.

Public Health Significance

The continuous quality improvement effort in a hospital includes many aspects of process improvement. The process improvement process includes stages such as diagnose and investigate problems, design the change, implement the change, evaluate and study the results, research for new insights and solutions, adopt or abandon or modify actions.

This process exactly reflects public health services like monitoring, diagnosis and investigation, mobilization, policies development and plan, linkage, evaluation and research.

The electronic health record Meaningful Use Documentation meets public health functions like enforcement and evaluation. As meaningful use is a new regulation from CMS, we enforce laws and regulations that protect health and ensure patients’ safety by meeting those requirements. Meanwhile, we need to evaluate the effectiveness and accessibility of the EHR services.

All the above indicate the public health significance in improving quality management in a hospital setting.

Lessons Learned

1) As a fresh intern, never be picky about the job assigned to you, but pay attention to what you can learn from the process.

2) People around you in a working environment are always your best teachers to help you grow in your career.

3) Details matter! No matter you are responsible for preparing a conference/ event, or leading a project, details decide how successful you will be.

4) Always be nice to people! Always be appreciative to people who help you!
Public Health Significance

It is no secret that tobacco use creates an enormous burden on the health of the world’s population. In the United States, tobacco remains the most preventable cause of death and disease. A staggering amount of adults and children are affected by tobacco use, whether directly or indirectly. While specific activities may differ, there are four goals common to any tobacco control program: preventing initiation among youth and young adults, promoting quitting among adults and youth, eliminating exposure to secondhand smoke, and identifying and eliminating tobacco-related disparities among population groups.

This project directly addressed two of essential services of public health. Evaluating the effectiveness, availability, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services was a central part of this project. This project was also unique in that it attempted to research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems by looking at other programs. This provided the LTCP with many ideas of where to focus their next efforts.

Tobacco Control in Louisiana

Tobacco Control Evaluation with the Louisiana Tobacco Control Program

By: AIDA LISAN

During my time at Pennington Biomedical Research Center (PBRC), I worked on an evaluation project with the Louisiana Tobacco Control Program (LTCP). The LTCP was interested in revamping their current evaluation methods and wanted to study other successful state programs to do so. I was tasked with researching other selected programs and making recommendations to the LTCP regarding improvements to their evaluation component. Research included studying the LTCP, background statistics on tobacco control on both a state and national level, and researching which state programs were most effective.

My final report for both PBRC and the LTCP gave detailed information on the various state tobacco control programs and highlighted critical aspects of each program. The report also addressed challenges and provided recommendations for the LTCP to improve their evaluation methods.

Important Dates

- July 17 at 2:00PM: Tobacco Control Conference Call Presentation
- August 9 at 9:00AM: Louisiana Tobacco Control Program Staff Meeting

Lessons Learned

- Be prepared to work! Even though I was unfamiliar with tobacco control programs and their specific activities, I completed my practicum feeling accomplished and confident about what I had produced.


http://www.quitwithusla.org

http://quitwithusla.org
HIV and Mental illness

Linkage and coordination, no easy feat!

By: Priya Prabhakar

HIV is an illness with a great impact on society both as a disease and as a source of discrimination, much like mental illnesses. I approached Ryan White with a desire to help people living with HIV and mental illness. The planning council then decided to handle the problem by promoting coordination between the HIV and mental health systems hence ensuring better care to those affected.

My duties were to hold key informant interviews and build collaboration between local HIV and mental health systems. The final product of my practicum other than the utmost satisfaction of getting organizations to work together were the creation of a Logic model defining effective local coordination in HIV prevention and care and a process evaluation tool.

Hopefully there will be pilot program based on it in the near future!

Public Health Significance

The Ryan White planning council provides most essential public health services to its clients. They are active in education, policy development, Research, Evaluation. Basically everything but enforcing laws! My practicum however focused on two essential services. A. Mobilizing community partnerships to identify and solve health problems by convening and facilitating partnerships among agencies related to HIV care and prevention and agencies related to mental illnesses.

2. Building a coalition to draw on the full range of potential resources both human and material to improve the health of the community.B. Evaluate effectiveness, accessibility and quality of personal and population based health services by 1. Assessing program effectiveness by borrowing information from the logic model for organizational collaboration. 2. Providing information (gathered by literature review and key informant interviews) necessary for resource allocation

Pizza and dogs!

Most meetings at NAMI and Ryan White planning council always had snacks or coffee! Alzheimer’s association even had an office pet! Never a dull moment! On a more serious note - The highlight of the practicum would be all the amazing, knowledgeable and dedicated people that I got to interact with!

Rome was not built in a day and Organizations take time to respond; sometimes they even forget you ever approached them! Don’t give up, try and try again!
Establishing A Child Health Advocacy Center in Houston

By: Divya Sabapathy

Doctors for Change (DFC) is a non-profit organization of health professionals, dedicated to improving health outcomes in Houston. Among other projects, DFC is currently focused on establishing a center for child health advocacy in collaboration with Children at Risk (CR) - another prominent advocacy & research organization in Texas.

Working with DFC on this initiative, I attended planning meetings, researched current efforts in child advocacy, and drafted surveys & proposals. I also gained experience in collaborating with professionals from all disciplines who are committed to a common goal – improving child health. Through this groundwork, my mentor and I sought to establish the core of the new advocacy center – framing its mission, priorities, legislative agenda, and sketching an organizational structure. For my final deliverable, I planned to compile the above information into a formal proposal.

Though the center is yet to have a formal establishment, I am proud to have contributed to the early phases of what promises to be strong force in child health advocacy.

**Public Health Significance**

The new advocacy center reflects the commitment of DFC and CR to enhancing children’s wellness through research, public policy and education.

More specifically, both organizations emphasize research to understand current health trends and develop innovative solutions. For example, we recently developed a survey to collect nutrition and student fitness data in Harris County schools. Such data is also used to evaluate existing health programs and the quality of life of children in Houston. Also, from filing bills on community health workers, to testifying on other bills regarding child health, policy development is a crucial component of child health advocacy. Finally, DFC and CR believe in educating and informing the public about child health, both through forums and media campaigns.

In all, DFC and CR have established a reputable name for themselves as champions of the Essential Public Health Services. A product of this collaboration, the nascent child health advocacy center has the propensity to make great contributions to public health as well!
Learning the Ins & Outs of Non-Profit Academic Healthcare Management

By: Robin Sawoska

As a student in the Masters of Community Health Practice I found the opportunity to explore a different facet of the MPH program to be fascinating. My goal was to gain a working knowledge on non-profit and academic management skills that are essential to the running of an academic medical center. A majority of my time this semester was spent compiling data from the results of the Baylor College of Medicine (BCM) Employee Satisfaction Survey that had 1,439 completed responses. I assisted in embedding the collected responses into PowerPoint files and the creation of a report that have since been disseminated by Project Managers to BCM Faculty. Another opportunity I had while at BCM was to provide a write up for the new Cardiovascular Research Institute which is now posted on the BCM website.

Public Health Significance

The Office of the President has many roles that it fills to meet Baylor College of Medicine’s (BCM) needs. During my practicum experience I was able to work with multiple aspects of public health. The survey conducted is similar to the needs assessment process that I have learned through the Community Health Practice Program. It assesses where BCM is now and helps to determine where they want to go in the future. It is a valuable piece of research into the University’s current state of mind with information being gathered from faculty and staff at all levels. The information that has been gathered is already being incorporated into BCM’s Strategic Vision Plan and will be used to inform and educate leadership, faculty, and staff. The plan will be based on past excellence; it will be used by BCM to grow into the future and to continue to meet the needs of the community by providing competent quality education, patient health care, research, and community service.

Interesting Events

- I was able to get a first hand look at how a strategic vision plan takes shape over time.
- I had the opportunity to tour the new McNair Building and learn about all the planning necessary to create this new endeavor.

Advice for Future Students

- Look at the big picture. A project may seem small at first but at the end you will have done something great and worthwhile.
- The healthcare field is vast and there is always more to learn. Be sure to ask questions if you have them!
Public Health Significance

While my experience encompassed a number of the 10 essential public health services, I feel that two were most apparent in the work I have done.

The first and most obvious is the service of assuring a competent healthcare workforce. Through supporting a medical school, I was able to help ensure that there would be extremely capable physicians and researchers to serve for many years to come.

The second service was in developing policies and plans to support individual and community health efforts. The immense undertaking of developing a strategic plan for the next seven years has helped to define the manner and availability of health care and services for the future population of a rapidly expanding metropolitan area. By examining our environment and developing a plan for our resources, we hope to ensure the availability of high-quality, necessary care.

Support and Leadership in a Major Medical School

By: Timothy Slice

As a project intern in the Office of the President at Baylor College of Medicine, I was able to contribute to a number of important initiatives and endeavors.

In addition to researching and identifying candidates for open department chair positions, researching concepts for the new leadership and cardiovascular research institutes, and analyzing employee surveys, a large portion of my time this past semester was invested in strategic planning initiatives. I have been involved in the planning and execution of meetings conducted by leadership with various faculty members to identify areas of need and opportunities for the school in order to develop a strategic plan to guide the organization through 2020.

Lessons Learned

• Pursue your interests. Whether or not your preceptor has specific duties for you to perform, don’t be afraid to ask after particular topics of interest and how you can support those.
I was involved with data analysis, generating complex data from clinic stations and evaluation of data at the MD Anderson cancer center.

My research was on renal cell cancer.

The approach taken by MDACC is to educate public on cancer prevention and early routine checks.

I worked on predictors of positive nodes in renal cell cancer. I did data analysis, evaluation and generation of complex data from clinic station.

We hope to publish the result of the study, but it is still ongoing.

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**Public Health Significance**

I was involved in research at my practicum site. Cancer is a big public health issue. Presently a lot of efforts are made by my host organization on prevention, health education and early routine checks.

My project as stated was analyzing the data we have on 1573 patients, to see what new discoveries are therein to tackle the disease better. As we all know that there is still no cure for cancer.

The vision of the host organization is to make cancer history.

A lot of energy is also put into educating staffs and public awareness and making the hospital easily accessible to patients or public who need treatment or information on cancer of any form or shade.

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**Highlights at MDACC**

- Seminars to educate internist, practicum students and research assistants on cancer prevention and awareness.
- I witnessed some surgical operations.
- Attended didactic scientific sessions.

**Advise for future practicum students**

- Always listen to details and be eager to learn.
Pilot Study of the $4 Pharmacy Program

By: Kelli Wallen

My practicum involved research on the $4 generic prescription medication programs offered by some community retail pharmacies. The final product was a paper discussing the results of the pilot study.

The research involved current US pharmaceutical policies, generic prescription drug programs and how these programs may improve accessibility and adherence to prescription medications in the uninsured and underinsured.

This was a pilot study involving a 21 question survey of 54 customers at a community retail pharmacy regarding their prescription medication purchases and adherence to the medications.

Further research will likely be conducted in the future in order to expand the study to a larger sample of retail pharmacy customers.

Public Health Significance

Of the ten essential public health services put forth by the APHA, this practicum involved the evaluation of how effective and accessible a policy has been toward alleviating some of the barriers faced by millions of uninsured and underinsured Americans trying to obtain their prescription medications each month. This practicum also involved some preliminary research into whether the $4 generic prescription medication program allows people to not only obtain their prescription medications, but also to adhere to the medication program.

The hypothesis is that those who have greater accessibility to their medications through this program will be more likely to take their medications regularly and that we may see an improvement in the overall health of certain populations as a result.

Further research is needed to determine this.

Practicum Highlights

- In depth understanding of a policy that I previously knew nothing about
- An increased interest in pharmaceutical policy and the desire to take my research to the next level

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Write every single day. Even if it is for fifteen minutes. Your writing and the final product will be of much better quality if you do not procrastinate. Even if you think you write better under pressure, your best work is done at a slow and steady pace that allows you to chew over what you have written and let the ideas form coherently in your mind; allowing you to articulate better on paper.
Public Health Significance

My practicum with DFC encompassed many of the 10 essential public health services. One of the top three services utilized by DFC would be to inform, educate, and empower people about health issues. This was displayed during my practicum with the development of the Voters guide. The Voters guide summarizes the positions of candidates in state and local races regarding health care issues. The guide publishes candidates' answers to questions posed to them by members of DFC. I assisted the president of DFC with mailing out questionnaires, collecting responses, calling candidates, troubleshooting issues with the volunteers and organizing the results for the guide. My other duty was creating the DFC legislative agenda for the Texas 83rd Legislature Regular Session. I assisted with researching various health care related issues, creating one page summaries for the main topics and developing research based recommendations for other topics of interest.

Life as an Advocacy Coordinator

By: Amber M. Weed

I was given the opportunity to intern as the Legislative Advocacy Coordinator with Doctors for Change (DFC). Doctors for Change is a non-profit 501(c)3 made up of health care professionals in the Houston area focusing on creating equitable and just health care for all of Harris County. I was assigned to work on the 2012 Voters Guide. The Voters Guide summarizes the positions of candidates in state and local races regarding health care issues. The guide publishes candidates' answers to questions posed to them by members of DFC. I assisted the president of DFC with mailing out questionnaires, collecting responses, calling candidates, troubleshooting issues with the volunteers and organizing the results for the guide. My other duty was creating the DFC legislative agenda for the Texas 83rd Legislature Regular Session. I assisted with researching various health care related issues, creating one page summaries for the main topics and developing research based recommendations for other topics of interest.

Advice for Future Students

• All students should find a practicum that aligns with their interests. Always check the practicum listings but also be prepared to search other avenues. Lastly, never forget to ask your advisor or other professors for practicum recommendations.

Special events/duties during your practicum

• Developing a healthcare focused legislative agenda with all of the members of DFC.
• Meeting the President of the Children’s Defense Fund of Texas
• Being able to take a lead role in the creation of the DFC Voters Guide.

Public Health Significance

My practicum with DFC encompassed many of the 10 essential public health services. One of the top three services utilized by DFC would be to inform, educate, and empower people about health issues. This was displayed during my practicum with the development of the Voters guide. The Voters guide summarizes the positions of candidates in state and local races regarding health care issues. The guide publishes candidates' answers to questions posed to them by members of DFC. I assisted the president of DFC with mailing out questionnaires, collecting responses, calling candidates, troubleshooting issues with the volunteers and organizing the results for the guide. My other duty was creating the DFC legislative agenda for the Texas 83rd Legislature Regular Session. I assisted with researching various health care related issues, creating one page summaries for the main topics and developing research based recommendations for other topics of interest.
**Public Health Significance**

My practicum experience did not necessarily cover all of the 10 Public Health Essential Services but it was closely aligned with #8: assuring a competent workforce. An increased awareness of the barriers faced by vulnerable populations targeted in the inclusion statement/philosophy the RWPC ultimately wishes to develop is one of the major goals.

I would say that the development of a functional inclusion philosophy is also in accordance with #5: developing policies and plans that support individual & community health efforts.

The goal of an inclusion statement and/or philosophy is meant to make affected individuals feel more comfortable in seeking out the care for which they qualify.

I have observed that the RWPC performs each of the essential functions perhaps with the exception of #6 (enforcing laws & regulations). At any given point there are research projects taking place (i.e., I am aware of a transgender study currently being conducted) and partnerships with other area agencies, providers, and entities are heavily utilized.

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**Meetings, a Health Fair, and Interviews**

- Meetings and key informant interviews with community members were highly informative.
- Although not directly related to my task, volunteering at an HIV health fair for the Hispanic/Latino community provided valuable exposure to its members.

**Things Don’t Always Happen As Planned**

- It’s okay to start with a detailed plan but don’t panic when you hit a roadblock. The time given to achieve the deliverables outlined is finite in nature – just do as much as you can in the time given to you!
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/