Governmental Public Health Practice Award: Program Overview

What is the Texas Public Health Training Center?
The Texas Public Health Training Center (TPHTC) is one of 37 Public Health Training Centers across the nation established as collaborations between accredited schools of public health, governmental and public health agencies and related organizations. The TPHTC is a collaboration of the following three schools: The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston School of Public Health, The University of North Texas Health Science Center School of Public Health and Texas A&M University Health Science Center School of Rural Public Health. The mission of the TPHTC is to improve the state’s public health system by strengthening the technical, scientific, managerial and leadership competencies and capabilities of the current and future public health workforce.

The Governmental Public Health Practice Award
The Governmental Public Health Practice Award seeks to further the mission of the TPHTC by giving students the opportunity to have applied experience in the public health system. The TPHTC Governmental Public Health Practice Award is the first internship program of its kind. This 200 hour, paid ($2400 stipend) internship will provide interns with the experience necessary to excel in public health departments following graduation. The goals of this program are:

- To enable students to be prepared for careers in health departments through applied opportunities
- To expose students to career opportunities in governmental public health
- To orient interns to the practice, policies and skills necessary to thrive in the public sector
- To assist governmental public health in recruiting qualified candidates

Interns will have direct experience in various divisions of county and regional health departments. Each intern will be supervised and mentored by an experienced public health professional. Students will also have the opportunity to interact with other professionals in the field. Since the internship satisfies the practicum requirement, each intern will be responsible for finding their own practicum and completing a final project that has been approved by their supervisor and the TPHTC. Students are encouraged to contact their academic institution for specific academic requirements.

Nine interns were selected through a competitive application process for the Summer 2013 semester. They represented three schools of public health: Texas A&M University Health Science Center School of Rural Public Health, The University of Texas School of Public Health, and the University of North Texas Health Science Center School of Public Health. Students representing five different divisions or programs worked throughout the state for various governmental public health organizations. Each page below represents the experience of a different student ~ they are as broad and varied as the field of public health itself!
## Practicum Topics

Serving Size: 1 Practicum per Student  
Servings per e-Magazine: 9

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Public Health Significance

Overall, I had a very positive practicum experience. I found it to be both enjoyable and educational. I gained much valuable knowledge about public health at the national level. It was exciting to see that the activities at this level pursued to fulfill the 10 Essential Public Health Services (EPHS).

My practicum experience was specifically focused on the following EPHS: Assure and Research. These two were accomplished through several activities as a means of helping OHCE develop a comprehensive research and creative strategies to effectively launch public health campaigns.

For example, I conducted literature reviews on best-practices in the public health and commercial marketing domains. I created a report and disseminated this information to campaign managers to assure that they understand the science behind our communication efforts.

Additionally, the information from this research afforded OHCE new insights and creative solutions to develop a public health campaign that is relevant to our target population.

Memorable Experience

- I attended the only national conference dedicated to addressing the health and social issues attributed to Smokeless and Spit Tobacco Use.

Lessons Learned

- It would be important for students to have both the time and mindset to accommodate setbacks and flexibility as the situation dictates.
Evidence-based program for physical activity & education

By Kiran Bhurtyal

Fit & Strong! is an evidence-based program geared towards older adults with lower extremity osteoarthritis. It consists of a physical activity and an educational/group discussion component. My practicum was at the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) of Brazos Valley Council of Governments (BVCOG) and Program on Healthy Aging at the School of Rural Public Health (SRPH). As a data collaborator, I was responsible for data collection (participant and agency forms), aggregation, and data analysis.

Our team developed a comprehensive database of over 200 participants from three rural and two urban sites from fall 2012 to summer 2013. A typical participant was a retired, married white female with more than high school education.

We analyzed program impact on participant symptoms and physical activity. Program participants reported decreased lower extremity pain and stiffness and were engaged in more aerobic activity and exercise for strength/flexibility at the end of the program.

Public Health Significance

Physical inactivity among seniors is a major public health problem. With an aging population growing steadily, it is expected to put an enormous burden on healthcare resources.

Evidence-based programs like Fit & Strong! are designed to translate the benefits of experimental research into community settings. It enables older adults to engage in physical activity and organize themselves to problem solving. The educational component informs participants about benefits of exercise, helps participants increase self-efficacy, empowering them to remain physically active and continue to make healthy lifestyle choices.

As a field-based intervention, Fit & Strong! encourages community partnership among local senior centers, healthcare settings and faith based organizations. Furthermore, by mobilizing community members to become lay trainers, it builds program capacity for long term sustainability.

Advice for Future Students

• Develop a protocol for data collection, missing values, and scales before analysis.
• Use your practicum experience to your maximum benefit-it is a prelude to real-life settings.

Special events/ highlights during the practicum
• Gained first-hand experience with evidence-based program
• Developed skills on coding variables and developing composite scales
• Familiarized with local Area Agency on Aging’s mission and services

Fit & Strong! Session: Strength exercise
Photo courtesy: Hilltop Lakes class participant

Source: srph.tamhsc.edu

Summer 2013 • Kiran Bhurtyal • Brazos Valley Area Agency on Aging and Program on Healthy Aging , SRPH • Fit & Strong !
My practicum experience was very diverse. In addition to my practicum with the Texas Department of State Health Services (TDSHS), Office of Border Health, I participated in the Blue Ribbon Internship Program. Additionally, I attended various meetings, teleconferences, and tours of the Texas State Lab and Austin State Hospital.

I also participated in 2 major regional events: Operation Lone Star and the US-Mexico Border Obesity Prevention Summit (BOPS). I co-moderated a track session entitled Prenatal, Early Life, and Schools. The Border Obesity Prevention Summit was a 3 day event in McAllen, Texas to develop strategies to combat and prevent obesity which is currently a public health epidemic on the Border. Distinguished speakers and a true binational audience contributed to the success of the Summit.

My final project consisted of a power point presentation in Austin about my experience with TDSHS.

THE BEST OF COMMUNICATION, COORDINATION & COLLABORATION

By: VERONICA COX

My practicum experience allowed me to witness the implementation of many of the Essential Services of Public Health.

In particular, the Office of Border Health (OBH) excels at mobilizing community partnerships to identify and solve health problems. They do this by working with programs within TDSHS, with other Partners/State agencies, and by collaborating binationally with Mexico to promote and protect the health of Border residents, particularly in the battle against Obesity.

Locally, the McAllen-Edinburg-Mission metropolitan statistical area is the #1 most obese metro area in the Nation (US News & World Report, 2012).

Contributions include the Border Obesity Prevention Summit and Border Binational Health Week (BBHW) October 2013.

During BBHW, OBH will be hosting a Health and Wellness Seminar for Community Health Workers (CHWs). CHWs inform, educate, and empower the poor and underserved about health related issues.
Tuberculosis in Tarrant County

Public Health Significance

Tuberculosis is a communicable, airborne disease that has global prevalence of 30% and is a major public health challenge. Monitoring is perhaps the most critical Public Health Essential Service in the field of TB control. My practice experience focused on monitoring. By participating in TB screenings for vulnerable populations and assisting with contact investigation interviews, I actively carried out this service.

Tarrant County Public Health TB division lists monitoring clinically active TB cases as its number two functional elements, behind only policy formulation for TB control. For example, all TB cases in Tarrant County are reported to the TB division for monitoring and the initiation of a contact investigation if necessary. In addition, the TB division conducts active monitoring of the residents of homeless shelters, contacts of those diagnosed with clinically active TB, as well as local hospitals and jails.

Tuberculosis Elimination and Epidemiological Research

By: Emily Spence Davizon

As an intern in the Tarrant County Public Health Tuberculosis Division, I participated in outreach and research activities aimed at controlling and understanding Tuberculosis (TB) disease. I learned how to administer the Tuberculin skin test (TST), a commonly used screening test for TB exposure or infection. During my 5-week practice experience, I administered upwards of 100 TSTs in a variety of settings such as homeless screenings and contact investigations. I also assisted with study subject enrollment, data collection, and quality assurance for a CDC study to understand which of the three currently available TB tests is the best to detect latent or active TB and to predict which persons are most likely to progress to active TB disease.

Highlights of my practice experience

- Conducting TB screening for ~150 residents of homeless shelters in Tarrant Co.
- Utilizing medical Spanish to assist in TB contact investigations.

Lessons Learned:

- Within infectious disease services, Tuberculosis elimination and control is so important that it has its own division within Tarrant County Public Health, unlike any other disease with mandated reporting.

Photo source: www.jarretmorrow.com

Tarrant County Public Health Headquarters, Ft. Worth, Texas


Summer 2013 • Emily Spence Davizon • Tarrant County Public Health Department • Tuberculosis Elimination and Epidemiological Research
African American Infant Mortality Disproportionately High

By: RACHEL FARLEY

The infant mortality rate in the United States for African Americans is 2.4 times the rate among white women. African American women also have higher rates of low birth weight and preterm births and maternal mortality. The disparities remain even when controlling for income and education level.

I worked in the Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health Division of the City of Austin Health and Human Services Department and participated in the planning phase of a new program seeking to address this health disparity.

Research and community input will be used to plan a one-year pilot project to improve birth outcomes among African American women in Travis County.

Public Health Significance

Reducing the disparities in African American birth outcomes is not an easy task, but the Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health Division has made this issue a priority.

The program I have been helping to plan will provide many of the essential public health services. My duties include researching insights and innovative solutions to addressing this disparity. The health department is engaging African American women, health care practitioners, academics and others to seek input and mobilize partnerships to address this disparity.

The program will likely include a training and certification component for community health workers to assure a competent workforce to tackle this issue. Once the program begins, it will inform and educate people about this disparity and empower people to address it. The program will also link African American women to personal health services.

Practicum Highlights

- I attended two focus groups of African American women to learn about their pregnancy and birth experiences and outcomes. It was a privilege to hear their stories.
- I also attended a meeting of the Maternal Infant Outreach Project (MIOP) Advisory Group to discuss program planning ideas and get their feedback and input.

Advice for Future Students

- If doing research, don’t hesitate to seek out assistance from the UTSPH librarians. They are very responsive and helpful.
Conducting a Needs Assessment Survey for the NorthSTAR Service Area

By: Linda Loggins

I was fortunate to be able to work at NTBHA as my practicum site. I learned from the Clinical Director that I would be working on a project that is only conducted every two years. I learned the entire process by which a needs assessment is conducted from the variety of tasks that I completed. During my internship, I helped create online surveys for system providers and stakeholders, and assisted in going out to individual provider sites to have consumers fill out client surveys. I was also allowed to enter the survey data into the database that will be used to create the final report – a local service area plan for 2014-2015.

The survey will continue to be conducted over the next several months, but preliminary findings indicate similar satisfaction scores as with the 2011 survey.

Public Health Significance

By helping to conduct a needs assessment survey, I helped to evaluate the effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of the behavioral health services that are provided in the NorthSTAR service area.

The NorthSTAR program is a publicly funded mental health/substance abuse treatment program serving indigent and Medicaid clients residing in a seven-county North Texas area including Collin, Dallas, Ellis, Hunt, Kaufman, Navarro and Rockwall counties.

The unique design of the NorthSTAR system provides improved access to care and reduces the time persons in need spend waiting for care.

Several clients who filled out surveys spoke of receiving high quality services from NorthSTAR and expressed how much they benefitted from the program.

Quality treatment is possible due to the system’s efficiency in care management and is reflected in favorable consumer satisfaction scores.
Practicum Experience at the ATCHHSD

By: Noor Mahmoud

The Health and Human Services Department at the City of Austin is a dedicated public health entity focused on reducing chronic conditions in the Austin area. It was inspiring to work with health professionals who empathize with health problems inflicting the city, particularly issues such as tobacco and secondhand smoke exposure. Primarily, I worked on the Smoke-Free Multiunit Housing (MUH) initiative, which targeted property managers and owners in the area. The initiative encourages property owners to adopt smoke-free policies and informs them about the benefits of going smoke-free. I was a part of a MUH Task Force with particular responsibilities. In order to familiarize property managers with the initiative, the ATCHHSD conducted a mail out to 500 multiunit housing. I created a property list database and prepared the envelopes for the mail out. Educational forums were scheduled to educate property managers on Smoke-Free Housing; therefore, I was responsible for contacting the housing sites and notifying them of upcoming forums.

One of my favorite projects at the practicum was creating the “Why Go Smoke-Free at Your Property?” postcard series to be mailed out later this year.

Public Health Significance

Reflecting on my practicum experience at the City of Austin, the Essential Service of Public Health that identifies most with my work is the third service: “Inform, Educate, and Empower.” Secondhand smoke (SHS) is a potent chemical that threatens the health of many, therefore educating properties about SHS dangers through the postcard series contributes to this essential service. In addition, the phone calls I conducted to property managers about the educational forums were an informational tactic provided through this essential service.

Practicum Highlights

• Participating in a Diabetes Zumba Class by taking waist and weight measurements for a post-evaluation assessment.

• Creating the Smoke-Free Multiunit Housing postcards that will mailed to property managers from August-November 2013.

Lessons Learned

Practicums are invaluable experiences that provide insight into the public health perspective. Therefore, it is important to take advantage of every opportunity offered at the internship. Be willing to contribute to additional projects and engage in your surroundings. Welcome challenges and voice any suggestions that may be beneficial to the project.

Why Go Smoke-Free At Your Property?
Reduce Business Costs. Improve Resident Health.

Protect the health of residents. Make your property safer. Save money. Go Smoke-Free.

The first postcard created for a four postcard series. This postcard informs property managers about the benefits of going smoke-free.
Implementing a CMS Grant Targeting Preterm Births

By: LINDA PHAM

With this CMS grant, the maternal medical home is being evaluated as to whether this model of care provides better care, improves health, and reduces costs for patients at risk for preterm births. The integrated approach includes a RN care coordinator, Community Health Workers, and referrals to community resources.

I participated on program management and ongoing evaluation tasks. Building evaluation into the implementation process allows for adjustments to be made as part of quality assurance and improvements.

My primary function was to analyze data on a weekly basis to track trends and develop meaningful charts to visualize what progress is being made on program implementation. Given the novelty of this grant, much of the work requires thinking and innovation, as well as extrapolation from similar situations on other grants when possible.

Public Health Significance

Essential Public Health Service #9: Evaluate effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services.

MIHS (Maricopa Integrated Health System) is the healthcare safety net provider in Phoenix. Therefore, their patient population is disproportionately vulnerable and often facing several barriers to care.

The current program builds on previous research that supports early entry into prenatal care in order to achieve maximal health outcomes both for mother and infant. The program provides delivery of care in the framework of a life course perspective.

If this Strong Start program can prove the success of this model with measurable outcomes, it could drive policy on a national level when determining Medicaid reimbursement of such services, thereby impacting maternal and child health on a national scale.

Strong Start for Mothers and Newborns provides enhanced prenatal care to improve outcomes for Medicaid patients at risk for preterm births.
**Gulf Bend Center: Medicaid 1115 Waiver**

**The Body IS Connected To The Mind**

By: Matt Yuen

Behavioral health has always been treated as a specialty. However, research has shown that 68% of behavioral issues have a physical co-occurring chronic disease associated with it. It turns out that the body is connected to the mind!

At Gulf Bend Center, we undertook new changes through the Medicaid 1115 Waiver Program. One of these five changes through the 1115 Waiver was integrating primary care and behavioral health together.

This summer, during my stay with Gulf Bend, I was tasked with implementing this idea. After a long, but interesting, 11 weeks of stakeholder meetings, working through contracts, and writing policies and procedures – it finally came together in a finished product.

We established the new concept of primary care and behavioral health integration in the greater Victoria area.

**Public Health Significance**

The Public Health Essential Service this particular project most relates to experience is the mobilizing of community resources.

During a local public health assessment, it found that Victoria had the services available to deal with many of the local health and behavioral issues. The problem was that not all the services were linked to one another in the local area. Because of the bad history between healthcare organizations, mobilizing community resources and partnerships were the top of priority.

What ended up occurring was that Gulf Bend Center would work with local hospitals and local general practice physicians to make this project work. By linking all these services together, we are able to fully integrate services to guarantee better services for patients.

**Highlight**

In addition to the 4 Medicaid 1115 projects, I was able to work on expanding Gulf Bend Center’s current crisis center abilities. In the new year, Gulf Bend Center is expand its current crisis capabilities with an Extended Observation Unit through a $1.865 million grant that the Medicaid 1115 team and I wrote.

Speak Smart, and Speak Up!

- You may just be a lowly intern working for summer. But never be afraid to speak up. People will listen to what you have to say. This is because organizations are interested in seeing problems from a different perspective.

While we weren’t allowed to cut the ribbon at our new satellite facility in Pt. Lavaca, we were allowed to play with the ceremonial scissors.

This facility will serve over 350 unique children/year in the greater Pt. Lavaca area. This particular facility aims to integrate primary and behavioral health.
For more information regarding the Governmental Public Health Practice Award, visit: https://sph.uth.edu/research/centers/tphtc/ or send an email to: tphtc@uth.tmc.edu

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/