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 eleventh-edition e-magazine showcases student practicum experiences throughout the Summer 2013 semester. (Prior semesters may be accessed through the e-book, a collection of student abstracts and e-magazines describing their experiences.)
Practicum Topics

Serving Size: 1 Practicum per Student
Servings per e-Magazine: 38

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### Austin Regional Campus

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<td>Central Texas Skunk Rabies</td>
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<td>Continuity of Care for Migrant Patients</td>
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### Dallas Regional Campus

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Health Advocacy for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

When most people think of Special Olympics, they think of a sports organization. What most people don’t realize however is that this non-profit has expanded to also advocate for certain rights including adequate health care services for individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID). This summer I had the opportunity to intern in the Research and Evaluation department, where I worked primarily on their annual health policy report. Over the summer, I cleaned up their questionnaire, distributed the survey to Special Olympics programs in over 150 different countries, and am currently in the process of analyzing the data to report back to the research team. This report should share insight on how countries are addressing the health concerns of individuals with ID worldwide, in hopes to share successful strategies with others.

Public Health Significance

This practicum experience is most related to the final essential public health service listed - research. With hundreds of programs worldwide, it is difficult for the organization’s headquarters to keep track of the innovative methods program leaders take to tackle healthcare issues for their athletes. For instance, one thing the organization has found regarding quality healthcare for individuals with ID is that many have trouble finding healthcare providers that will take them as patients. Many doctors tend to not know how to effectively communicate with this population, and will frequently avoid taking in patients with intellectual disabilities, or if they do, they will not do as thorough of a job. Malaysia took a stance on this issue by requiring a change in medical school course curriculum. Now all medical students in Malaysia are required to take a course that teaches how to effectively communicate with special populations.

Special Events During my Practicum

- Attended the United States International Council on Disabilities (USICD) annual meeting
- Met and spoke with the CEO of the organization, Tim Shriver

Advice for Future Students

- Don’t shy away from asking lots of questions! As an intern, you are not expected to know the ropes just yet, and most people love sharing their wisdom. Some of the most educational experiences this summer for me were when I was given the opportunity to interview different officials in the office.

Healthy Communities- a program implemented by Special Olympics International to create a network between healthcare providers and athletes

Source: http://www.specialolympics.org/Slideshow2.aspx?id=18797

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The Hispanic Paradox

By: Cassandra Aponte

As a final project for my practicum, I did research on the Hispanic paradox and its influence on health. Having been exposed to this population during STEER, I felt it would be interesting to learn about this protective health factor.

There are many disparities among the Hispanic population compared to Whites. The Hispanic paradox is composed of four different theories: Acculturation, Barrio Advantage, Healthy Migrant, and the Salmon Bias. They are used to explain why a population that has increased risk factors associated with morbidity and mortality actually have lower mortality rates.

More evidence based research needs to be conducted to examine why newly immigrated individuals tend to have better health outcomes than established immigrants. It may provide insight into unnoticed unhealthy behaviors occurring in the United States.

Public Health Significance

Throughout my practicum, I got to visit different Colonias to observe some of the living conditions of this border population and its contribution to not only quality of life but of community health. I too was exposed to organizations that help this underserved community whether through medical care, home building, or knowledge.

The population along the Texas-Mexico border is truly unique. For example, there are disease occurrences that are known in the developing world; which helps bring community health into a new light.

The population along the Texas-Mexico border is truly unique. For example, there are disease occurrences that are known in the developing world; which helps bring community health into a new light.
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.

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

Disparities in African American Birth Outcomes

I researched data on these disparities, and programs that have had success in improving African American birth outcomes. Research points to the physiological effects of stress from racism as one of the main causes of this disparity. Because early entry into quality prenatal care has not eliminated this disparity, many call for a Life Course Perspective to address it, focusing on the health of a woman over the course of her life.


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.
Neglected Tropical Disease Research

Lymphatic Filariasis: Worming its way into the Americas

By: Monica Hernandez

During my internship at PAHO/WHO this summer, I am working within the Neglected Tropical Disease Unit where I conduct research on Lymphatic Filariasis (LF), a parasitic worm disease endemic in the Americas.

My research on LF mostly consists of gathering, synthesizing, and organizing LF information from various PAHO/WHO sources. These sources provide primary source information, such as technical reports from LF elimination conferences held between PAHO/WHO and endemic countries in the Americas (Brazil, Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Guyana). It also summarizes important PAHO/WHO policy documents on LF elimination in the Americas.

Over the course of my internship, I found my research on LF to be mostly limited by insufficient or missing information on LF. This comes as no surprise as LF is a neglected disease after all.

Wuchereria bancrofti, the most widespread parasitic worm species for Lymphatic Filariasis (LF) found within the Americas

Source: dpd.cdc.gov

Practicum Highlights

- During my practicum, I attended a conference on “LF elimination within Haiti” with several PAHO/WHO partners present at the conference, including the CDC and the Haitian Ministry of Health.

- Another highlight of my practicum was meeting Dr. Steven Ault, the Senior Advisor of Neglected Tropical Diseases at PAHO. My conversations with him highlighted PAHO’s ongoing “technical advocacy” needed to reach consensus with member countries on the elimination of various neglected diseases in the Americas.

Lesson Learned: Just say yes!

One key takeaway from my summer internship is to always be open to new experiences, as you never know what new opportunities or people you might meet along the way. It is really this attitude that opened the door for many of my experiences this summer.
Afterschool Physical Activity Evaluation

Unique Aspects

- From this experience, I have obtained a set of skills that I may have otherwise missed during my academic coursework.
- My contributions have the potential to affect several hundred children in Austin who attend afterschool programs at Foundation Communities sites!

Take it from me

- If your practicum does not require you to be physically present on site, detail a weekly goal for the number of hours you will work on the project and when you will fulfill them. Of course you will need to be flexible, but at least set out with an idea of how and when you will spend your time.

Developing an Evaluation Plan for Afterschool Physical Activity

By: Madeline Jeansonne

In response to the childhood obesity epidemic, experts are looking for new venues for intervention. Recently, afterschool programs have been recognized as potentially influential settings for increasing the amount of physical activity youth obtain each day. National standards now state that afterschool programs should provide attendees with half of their daily recommended physical activity (or 30

Public Health Significance

Unsurprisingly, the “Evaluate” component of the 10 Public Health Essential Services is most reflected by my practicum involvement. Because the majority of my practicum experience was spent learning evaluation methodology and developing the assessment plan, my contribution to Foundation Communities and Southwest Trails will hopefully enable them to evaluate the impact of their physical activity initiatives on the children attending their afterschool program. The results of the assessment can then be used to guide future program improvements.

Although my project focused on evaluating a current service, Southwest Trails promotes healthy lifestyles among its participants through numerous avenues. In addition to providing time for daily physical activity and encouraging student engagement, participants also receive nutritious snacks and are often encouraged to drink plenty of water while in attendance.
Food Purchase Behaviors among Low-income women

By: Yeonhee Kang

Some studies demonstrate that low income households spend a larger proportion of their eating out dollars at carry out places, and a larger proportion of their home beverage purchases are sugar sweetened beverages. Besides, according to Drewnowski (2004), as income and education decrease, rates of obesity increase. In this manner, Income is related to food purchase choices and these choices affect on health of people. My practicum was the project with Dr. Ranjit at UTSPH ARC. The project was about food purchase behaviors among low income before and after the educational intervention. I was responsible to project management, how to manage and analyze data, project evaluation, organization database, and summary report of preliminary data.

Public Health Significance

My practicum was involved in informing, Educating, and empowering people about food purchase behaviors and nutrition education program. The program focused on improved diets and nutritional welfare for the total family, increased knowledge of the essentials of human nutrition, increased ability to select and storage, safety, and sanitation, increased ability to manage food budgets and related to resources such as food stamps, and improved physical activity behaviors. Through this project, participants can have opportunities to recognize helpful nutrition and live healthy by choosing more healthy foods and fewer unhealthy foods.
A ‘Get Fit’ Overhaul

Improving the Efficacy of The BeHive’s ‘Get Fit’ Physical Activity Program

By: Kelly Klaas

The BeHive is an after school program that offers educational support to elementary school children on the east side of Austin. Over the course of this summer, I worked on reenergizing the ‘Get Fit’ physical activity component of the program to help make it more efficient and sustainable.

There were many challenges in this experience; one of the most prevalent being that all three BeHive locations offer different physical assets (as evidenced in the photos above). The second largest obstacle was that the staff does not have enough time to create their own ‘Get Fit’ curriculum therefore the majority of ‘Get Fit’ time is unstructured and essentially free playtime.

The final solution that I suggested for implementation was a tailored program based on proven systems which added structure to ‘Get Fit’ but at the same time allowed the staff to be flexible with activities based upon the assets that were available that day (i.e. gym space vs. outdoor space, 15 minutes vs. 30 minutes of available time, weather conditions, etc.)

A comparison photo showing the disparity in physical assets between The BeHive locations.

Lessons Learned

• The most memorable and rewarding moment of this experience was watching a nine year old organize and lead a group of 40 children in a physical activity without being asked or prompted by a staff member. This highlighted for me the fact that leaders are not chosen, they rise to the occasion.

Dig Deeper

• The root of any problem is normally hidden by an obvious symptom. To gain better insight and wisdom into how a problem can be improved upon, dig deeper, ask questions of stakeholders, peers and advisors, research proven solutions and be creative in generating an effective solution.

Public Health Significance

The BeHive’s ‘Get Fit’ program is addressing essential services of Public Health, especially as it informs, educates, and empowers the children regarding physical activity habits that they can adopt in order to be healthier.

Combined with classroom lessons the children receive about proper nutrition during the program, as well as many of them attending CATCH trained elementary schools, The BeHive is aiming to teach and empower them to make better, healthier choices in their lives which will hopefully carry over into their homes and stay with them as they get older.

For more information on The BeHive, please visit www.behiveaustin.org

For more information on CATCH, please visit www.CATCHUSA.org

Summer 2013 • Kelly Klaas • The BeHive • ‘Get Fit’ Overhaul
Public Health Significance

At ATCHHSD, there were two main Public Health Essential Services (PHES) that were most closely related to my work. The first being the third PHES of Informing, educating and empowering people about public health issues. I achieved this through the informative flyers I created for the Chronic Disease Prevention and Control Department.

The second PHES that was most closely related to my practicum was the fifth essential service of developing policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts. This PHES was achieved through my work on promoting Tobacco Free Worksites.

With my supervisor, I had the opportunity to go to healthcare organizations in Austin and discuss how to implement a Tobacco Free policy at those worksites. Tobacco Free policies improve the health and work ethic of employees and clients – giving everyone the right to a healthy environment at work.

Local Level Chronic Disease Prevention

The ATCHHSD Chronic Disease Prevention and Control Department works in policy issues and directly with people in the community in order to prevent many types of chronic disease. At my practicum I was able to work on both sides of the spectrum. I was fortunate to be able to work on the Tobacco Free Workplaces initiative and give presentations to organizations on how to go Tobacco Free. I also assisted on program implementation and research for a Youth Tobacco Cessation program.

Lessons Learned

• Take advantage of this opportunity by working on projects outside of your comfort zone. Offer to help when you see need. My work at ATCHHSD is not what I expected it to be – but working in new areas as need arose made it especially interesting.

ATCHHSD Highlights

• Through my practicum I was able to meet with people that worked at all levels and in varied positions at ATCHHSD to learn about their work and public health background.

• Another highlight for me was taking final measurements at a Diabetes Prevention Program Zumba Class. I enjoyed being able to meet the people who benefitted from ATCHHSD work and seeing a community health class.

Postcard developed for Smoke-Free Multi Unit Housing Information Forum. ATCHHSD Chronic Disease Prevention and Control.
Public Health Significance

Reproductive health is an important aspect of public health. All women have the right to choose the size and timing of their families, and need access to family planning services to do so. In Texas, many women do not have access to these services. Even before the funding cuts of 2011, only 32% of Texas women had access to publicly funded family planning.

The Texas Policy Evaluation Project is documenting the impact that these policy decisions have on family planning service providers and on individual women. Preliminary findings from Wave I last summer revealed that organizations were forced to close clinics, reduce hours, and cut staff. Many clinics implemented sliding-fee scales to make up for the budget shortfall. Some clinics limited the range of contraceptive methods available, withholding the most effective methods (long-acting reversible contraceptives such as intrauterine devices) because of high cost.

The Texas Policy Evaluation Project, like other public health research, is essential in documenting experiences and outcomes to affect policy change. The results will provide crucial information for future policy decisions.

Practicum Highlight: Roundtable on Latinas’ Access to Reproductive Healthcare, July 23 2013

- Sponsored by National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health and the Center for Reproductive Rights
- Overview of access to care in Rio Grande Valley
- Roundtable conversation among multiple stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds, including community educators, family planning providers, and researchers
- Focus on reproductive rights as human rights

Advice for Future Students

Spend time finding a practicum site that will allow you to do work that you care about. Be persistent! It’s a great opportunity for networking and meeting new and interesting people.
Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

By: Lauren Menasco-Davis

I worked at the KDK Harman Foundation, a small private family foundation dedicated to breaking the cycle of poverty for Austin area children. The foundation funded eleven different summer programs that served economically disadvantaged children in grades K-12. The overall goals of these summer programs were to stem the summer learning loss, provide free breakfast and lunch, and educate students in the subjects of health sciences, nutrition, engineering, and math in a fun hands-on way. My role at the foundation was to create an evaluation instrument to use for all of the programs. This is only the second summer the foundation has funded these types of summer programs and we wanted to help the grantees improve their program for future years.

Public Health Significance

The foundation worked to inform, educate, and empower children with the knowledge that they can be successful in school and they can lead healthy lives. This summer I also helped to mobilize community partnerships through the culminating event of the summer: a shared learning workshop. I was able to recruit local health professionals, scientists, and engineers employed at local Austin companies to come share their experiences with the non-profit organizations hosting the summer programs. The goal was to connect grantees with these professionals for field trip opportunities, possible funding sources, and overall knowledge of the health and science fields to improve the content of the summer camps. Overall finding the resources to feed the students, transport them to the camp, and educating the parents on why summer camp is important for their children are the three largest hurdles to overcome.

Advice for Future Students

• Working on the funding side of non-profits is a unique experience; if you have the opportunity to work in a foundation seize it.

Highlights

• I attended a national conference focused on improving health and science education for children.
• Over the summer I observed over 1,000 economically disadvantaged students receiving a high quality summer experience.
Content Analysis of Vaccine Promotion Materials

By: Alma G. Ochoa

I have worked with Dr. Mike Mackert to develop a content analysis of different vaccine promotion materials found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), and Immunization Action Coalition (IAC) websites.

This project aims to uncover aspects of vaccine promotion that may not be appropriately addressing the issues that are keeping people from getting vaccinated against a range of preventable diseases.

I am responsible for finding all available materials, creating the coding guide, and coding the promotion materials. Dr. Mackert has provided valuable advice based on his own academic experiences with content analyses and publishing research. The final product will consist of a paper intended for submission to a conference and publication.

Public Health Significance

Through this project, several of the essential public health services are being addressed:

- Inform, educate, and empower
- Link
- Assure
- Evaluate
- Research

Through the content analysis, I will be gaining information about gaps in health promotion when it comes to creating promotional materials for all kinds of vaccines.

It is important to address these shortcomings in order to give the community a better chance of making the right decision when it comes to vaccinating themselves and their families. These promotional materials serve to inform the population about the benefits of vaccines, but should also address concerns and provide the community with a way to seek more information. The University of Texas at Austin is helping to improve the competency of public health professionals in marketing healthy behaviors and preventive services.

Practicum Highlights

- I enjoyed having the freedom to choose a topic of importance to me and learning every step of the process along the way.
- It was a good opportunity to visit clinics located all over Austin and compare their infrastructures.

Advice for Future Students

- If things don’t go the way you originally planned, don’t be afraid to just go with it. It’s important to be flexible with the methods through which your end goals are achieved.
C. difficile Infection

**Practicum Highlights**

- Gained first-hand experience through interaction with patients, nurses, and other hospital staff.
- Participated in weekly C. difficile meetings geared towards discussing the different studies being done at TMC as well as sharing current results of their research.
- Saw first-hand the impact CDI has on not only the person diagnosed, but the family as well.

**Advice for Future Practicum Students**

- Don’t be afraid to ask questions. Your faculty sponsor and community preceptor are here to help and advise you throughout the practicum.

**C. difficile infection at SLEH: Summer 2013**

**Provide By: Lucy Pena**

My practicum was at St. Luke’s Episcopal Hospital in Houston, TX assisting in C. difficile infection research. During my practicum I participated in various aspects of patient-oriented research including data collection, patient screening, recruitment, and follow-up, specimen collection, as well as data entry. This summer I worked closely with Dr. DuPont and his study team on three different research studies on CDI, which included an observational study following patients diagnosed with CDI at SLEH over the course of 3 months for possible recurrences and cure. The other two studies focused on treatment methods for CDI such as the use of monoclonal antibodies. The recruitment and follow-up of patients were then discussed at weekly meetings held at the cooley building with various members of the CDI Team in attendance. During these weekly meetings I was able to see how a small group of people can make a huge difference.

**Public Health Significance**

When I first started this practicum I had only briefly heard about C. difficile in one of my undergraduate classes but I did not understand the magnitude in terms of risk and how likely C. difficile infection was acquired in hospitals, even surpassing the risk of MRSA. There are three main factors associated with CDI, which are antibiotic use, exposure to CD spores, and old age. It is when a patient has these three factors, their risk of obtaining CDI increase greatly.

One essential public health service that applies to this practicum is to diagnose and investigate. Throughout my practicum, I spoke with patients about their illness and possible recurrences. In doing so, we are able to investigate further the causes of recurrences as well as gain a better understanding of the disease. Another essential service that applies is to mobilize. As mentioned previously, weekly meetings are held where members of the CDI team gather to discuss CDI in hopes of preventing and curing this disease.
I worked directly with the Seton Total Health Team for the duration of my practicum. This program was developed to address the public health issue of health disparities by creating a team of physicians, nurses, social workers, and health promoters to work towards a client centered healthcare system. The Seton Total Health team specifically focuses on the individuals and families who are medically unfunded and low-income with an injury or disease and are accessing emergency services several times a year. While with the team this summer, I primarily followed and assisted the health promoters during intakes, home visits, and clinic visits with their patients and evaluated the efficiency of this new program.

### Public Health Significance

The Seton Total Health team has made it a priority to address the lack of accessible and affordable health services for the unfunded, underfunded, and low-income individuals and families.

In order to address this disparity, my practicum site focuses on the Essential Public Health Services of diagnosing and investigating health problems of their patients and empowers them through health education and advocacy to take control of their disease or injury. Each patient is assigned to a medical team with the patient’s needs at the center of the intervention. The patient has access to one-on-one counseling from a licensed dietician, meets regularly with their physician, nurses, and health promoter, and builds the skills of self-sufficiency through counseling from a licensed master’s social worker.

The program also continues to evaluate the effectiveness of this intervention by continuously tracking data surrounding enrolled and exited patients and their continued access of emergency services.

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**Highlights during my practicum**

- In order to provide beneficial feedback to the Seton Total Health team, I have been gathering data on the amount of financial strain to the program, caused by patients allowing their benefits (MAP, Medicaid, Medicare) to lapse.
- Working directly with patients to understand and manage their disease.

**Advice for Future Practicum Students**

- When looking for a practicum site, it’s important to choose a program with clearly defined duties and roles for the intern.
Supporting Women on Antepartum Bed Rest

Practicum Highlights

- Learned about antepartum bed rest by researching academic literature and existing programs
- Toured Neonatal Intensive Care Units to observe March of Dimes’ NICU Family Support Program
- Provided program recommendations for experts in the field
- Participated on planning calls with the program steering committee

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Treat your practicum as a valuable opportunity to learn about an organization or position that interests you.
- Don’t be afraid to approach an organization about setting up a practicum. They will generally be happy to have an extra set of hands helping out in the office!

Laying the Ground Work for Program Development

By: Ashley Price

March of Dimes is an organization that helps pregnant women have full-term pregnancies and also researches problems that threaten the health of babies.

This summer, I worked with March of Dimes’ Texas Chapter to develop a support program for moms on antepartum bed rest, as well as their families. Bed rest is prescribed to women with high risk pregnancies in an effort to prevent the onset of pre-term labor.

My practicum experience involved conducting a literature review to see what information and programs exist on this topic. I then developed recommendations on how the antepartum bed rest support program could best be organized and implemented.

My research and recommendations were distributed to members of the program steering committee and will help inform the direction of the new program.

Public Health Significance

The aim of the antepartum bed rest support program is to improve birth outcomes by helping women carry their pregnancies as long as possible. The program seeks to improve the experience of bed rest by supporting families during a stressful time. The longer the gestation period, the less likely a baby is to suffer from health problems after birth.

The Essential Public Health functions addressed during my practicum include: researching new insights and innovative solutions to health problems, mobilizing community partnerships to identify and solve health problems, and developing policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts. The program has the potential to touch families all over the state who are coping with bed rest.
Diabetic Blindness Prevention Program

By: Karisha Schall

The Volunteer Healthcare Clinic (VHC) is a nonprofit organization that functions almost entirely from a staff of volunteers. VHC treats patients who are without health insurance, living at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, and reside in Travis County. Every Monday evening VHC schedules chronic disease management (CDM) patients that are seen regularly during the course of a year for treatment of diabetes, hypertension, or endocrine disorders.

In 2012 VHC launched the Diabetic Blindness Prevention Program (DBPP) to help combat diabetic retinopathy. One of my routine tasks is to ensure that CDM patients diagnosed with diabetes have been given diabetic retinopathy screening vouchers. This voucher allows the patient to make an appointment with an optometrist to receive a retinopathy screening free of charge.

Public Health Significance

Diabetic retinopathy (DR) is the most common eye disease and leading cause of blindness among American adults. However, in populations where DR screenings have been established the incidence and prevalence of blindness and other severe complications have been reduced. Additionally, screening for DR is one of the most cost effective procedures available, as treatment for diabetic blindness costs many times more.

The Public Health Essential Services that most closely relate to my practicum experience are monitor, link, evaluate, inform, educate, and empower.

When giving out DR screening vouchers I was able to discuss the importance of the screening and how to achieve getting screened. Afterwards, I would follow up with patients and providers to ensure that the voucher was used, results were received, log tracking sheets maintained, and follow up appointments were made if necessary.

Comradery at VHC

- Getting to know all of the motivated volunteers at VHC was definitely a highlight of the internship.
- Appreciation for your services from the patients and staff at VHC was always apparent and made each day worthwhile.

Future Students or Volunteers

- Never underestimate your ability to make someone else’s life better- even if you never know it.
  - Greg Louganis
- The results of philanthropy are always beyond calculation.
  - Miriam Beard

This is a photograph of a fundus (eye) exhibiting severe proliferative diabetic retinopathy (PDR) with hemorrhages, exudates, neovascularization, fibrosis, and traction retinal detachment.

Photo courtesy of: http://www.visioncareeducation.com/article.aspx?article=10917&ca=ah

Volunteer Healthcare Clinic Building on June 30, 2011.

Photo Courtesy of: Aaron DeLaO in conjunction with VHC
Many maps were made utilizing GIS mapping techniques, as well as maps showing natural and man-made barriers, in order to determine if highways or waterways halted the epizootic. At this time, analysis is ongoing, but very preliminary data suggests in extreme cases the epizootic may move up to 25 miles in a year.

Highlights during my practicum
- Visited rabies necropsy lab and observed preparation of diagnostic slides of brain tissue.
- Examined fluorescent antibody stained diagnostic slides to determine if positive or negative for rabies.

Lessons Learned
Geographic information systems are very useful and of great value in public health. It would be beneficial to learn as much as you can about GIS, as it will probably only become more important in the future.

Three striped skunks (Mephitis mephitis), the most common reservoir of skunk rabies in Texas. Source: http://www.oregonskunkrescue.com/
Continuity of Care for Migrant Patients

Special MCN highlights

- Informational videos about Hombres Unidos, an initiative against partner violence, is well underway after having found an excellent cast
- MCN provides webinars for credit and continuing education. Check out http://www.migrantclinician.org/services/education/webinars.html

Offering Care Coordination Services for Migrants
By: Sheila Yu

Migrant Clinicians Network (MCN) is one of the leading organizations in raising awareness and helping support the needs of the mobile poor.

One of the numerous ways they accomplish this is through the work of Tuberculosis Network (TB Net), which is under MCN’s Health Network. Because many mobile TB patients get deported or leave the U.S. without notice, clinics are unaware at times of former patient health statuses. Here, TB Net steps in by directing deportees to healthcare services back in their home countries, constantly updating medical files, and maintaining clear communication between patients and clinics.

For my main project, I filed nearly 250 completion reports documenting that patients completed their treatments. In effect, mobile patients are accounted for through follow-ups, and clinics are properly informed of their status. In addition, the risk of TB drug resistance due to incomplete treatments (a scary topic on its own) also decreases.

Public Health

In terms of the Essential Services of Public Health, the services that most closely relate to my MCN practicum experience are:

- linking migrant patients to the healthcare services they need
- mobilizing groups to work together to find solutions

Specifically for TB Net, our team gives comprehensive case management by going the distance in terms of linking clinics to patients in difficult situations. For example, we recently got into contact with clinics in the DR Congo, despite the current civil war occurring there. Many Congolese patients will now receive uninterrupted healthcare whereas before services were hard to find or sporadic.

MCN also ensures that both the mobile individual and the community are up-to-date on health issues through educational pamphlets, videos, and webinars, etc. MCN helps in mobilizing communities to address issues through lay health workers, or promotores de salud. This allows migrants to easily understand the material presented instead of being flooded by jargon.

Advice for Future Students

Have an open mind! You never know how connections with your internship staff will open up new doors.

Dr. Ed Zuroweste and a migrant family’s baby
© Casa de Fe

Source: http://www.facebook.com/migrantclinician/photos_stream

Summer 2013 • Sheila Yu • Migrant Clinicians Network • Continuity of Care for Migrant Patients
From Pulling Articles to Practical Application

By: Jasmin Aldridge

I gained great insight into the world of epidemiological research while interning at the Cooper Institute. The Research Division provides the evidence to support certain preventive health behaviors. I got to see that in action this summer.

Using the extensive Cooper Center Longitudinal Study database, the doctors, researchers and biostatisticians managed to conduct multiple projects under pressing deadlines. Watching my mentor Laura DeFina, MD collaborate with Ben Willis, MD, MPH and Erica Howard, MS and other colleagues was very exciting for me. The particular projects I worked on involved relating lifestyle behaviors with certain atherosclerotic outcomes.

My duties included creating an evidence table of articles, constructing sample tables and graphs, and working towards my final project, an official manuscript. Over the course of the two months, I was able to directly apply Epidemiology I concepts to elucidate the complex connections between real-life exposures and outcomes.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience most closely exemplifies the 10th Essential Services of Public Health: “Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems.”

Just as many of us MPH students learn in our introductory epidemiology course, the once seemingly outlandish concept that smoking leads to lung cancer is now accepted public knowledge. This would not have been achieved without epidemiological research.

Compiling and analyzing data from individuals’ health behaviors and clinical measurements opens up many avenues to improve upon public knowledge.

The Cooper Institute is no stranger to this type of cutting edge research with various landmark articles reporting the far-reaching benefits of physical fitness.

This Institute continues to report up-to-date research to promote healthy behaviors for our society. I’m glad I got to be a part of that work this summer.
Prenatal Breastfeeding Promotion Project

**Highlights**

- Launch of the first 3 sites for the project in community Ob/Gyn clinics
- Collaborate with team members to seek grant/funding opportunities to allow expansion of the project to several other sites by end of 2013
- Developed grant writing skills, receiving feedback from experienced professionals

**Lessons Learned**

- Working with a grassroots public health project provides a unique experience to work with a small group of public health professionals implementing a novel program to address the needs of the community.
- Without a home base for the project, most of the work has been done through email, file-sharing and a few brainstorming sessions and work groups at local establishments.

**Breastfeeding Promotion to Address Childhood Obesity**

**By: Melanie Elliott**

The DFW Area Prenatal Breastfeeding Promotion Project is a grassroots initiative as part of the Be Our Voice campaign to reduce the incidence of childhood obesity. The project is endorsed by the Texas Pediatric Society (TPS) of which the primary project leader is a member on the Obesity committee.

The project was developed to provide direct training to Ob/Gyn physicians and staff to promote patient education regarding the health benefits of breastfeeding for both mom and the baby and promote informed decision making prior to delivery.

Simple surveys are administered to expectant moms during each trimester to assess effectiveness of physician interactions.

I assisted in development of training day materials and compiled necessary research to complete the CATCH grant submission to TPS.

**Public Health Significance**

The DFW Area Prenatal Breastfeeding Promotion Project works to educate and empower community obstetricians on the benefits of prenatal breastfeeding counseling and the long term health benefits in reducing obesity rates.

This project addresses the Public Health Essential Service to “Inform, Educate and Empower people about health issues.”

The project is actively working in Ob/Gyn clinics to support physicians and their staff in providing the most up-to-date information and resources to their patients.

The project will continue to provide educational resources, ongoing support and data collection from patient surveys to determine the effectiveness of the training initiatives.

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“I hope you will breastfeed -- it's the best thing for your baby and for your body” - phrase the participating physicians are trained to say to their patients

Electronics Waste (E-waste) Recycling

Practicum Highlights

- Flexible schedule
- Contact with federal agencies like Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Environmental Protection Agency
- Hands on interpretation of study data
- Mentor-like relationship with investigator

Advice for Future Practicum Students

Flashbacks to organic chemistry lectures are inevitable when you hear terms like bromination, chlorination, hydroxylate, etc. Even though the words are used frequently it is not necessary to have a previous familiarity with the subject matter. If you are like me and shiver at the thought of chemistry, then my advice is to review literature centered on public health (these tend to be free of toxicology terminology).

An organics and metals biomonitoring study of e-waste recycling workers.

Many of us dispose of our electronics without knowledge of its whereabouts after they get to the curve. This practicum teaches what happens at the end of that journey. Developing countries import our e-waste and save valuable metals and components for reuse, while incinerating others. E-waste recycling work is commonly done at home-based facilities without much protection against pollutants known to be endocrine disruptors and carcinogens.

A major role in this project is to assist with literature reviews to compile information that may be useful in publications. Organizational skills with a strong proficiency in Microsoft Office helps to manage the data used to make tables of results. The investigators guide assistants to make the correct inferences, especially by encouraging comparisons of the participants in Vietnam to results produced by NHANES Exposure Report, 2009. Overall, it makes you think twice before upgrading your phone.

Public Health Significance

The project involved in this practicum is designed to biomonitor the exposure levels of organics and metals in e-waste recycling workers. Many studies have explored metals concentration in urine samples, while others have looked at similar exposures in blood. As the project diagnoses and investigates pollutants found in electronics, other experts in the field can research the potential health effects and consequences on e-waste recycling workers in developing countries.

Many of the faculty at the School of Public Health-Dallas Regional Campus only work with communities in the city. However, the investigator’s established collaborations in Vietnam help give a new perspective of potential harms an individual can encounter. Discussions about work environments, regulations, and policies can be raised to safeguard the health of those engaged in dismantling electronics.

Imported E-waste

Source:

Electronic waste management in Vietnam: Current situation and solutions presentation

www.epa.gov.tw/FileLink/FileHandler.ashx?file=14844
Health Lifestyle Education for Children

Practicum Highlights

- Of the 27 children in the West Orem YMCA 7-week program, 81% were classified as obese with a BMI above the 95th percentile while only 11% were classified as normal with a BMI between the 5th and 85th percentile.

- In the program, the average intake of fruits per week was 3.5 cups and the average vegetable intake was 2.8 cups. These averages meet the recommendations set by the CDC.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

Pick a practicum experience with a topic that truly interests you. For me that meant picking a practicum that was more hands-on with less desk time. Choosing a practicum based on what you think may look best on a resume will likely leave you with an experience you do not fondly remember. Being interested in the topic will help you to stay actively involved in the process behind the project.

Texas Children’s Health Plan: The Keep Fit Program

By: Courtney Kauffman

The Keep Fit Program targets TCHP members and their families who are at-risk for obesity-related conditions. Members ages 10 to 18, along with their families, are eligible for 7 weeks of free nutrition and exercise classes provided by TCHP at local parks, schools, and YMCAs. As an intern for the program I was responsible for collecting and analyzing data gleaned from the program participants each week. Data included height and weight measurements, a weekly food and exercise log, and surveys regarding readiness to change habits, nutrition knowledge, and satisfaction with the program. Most data are used to analyze the success of the program and create recommendations for the future. Participant information is input into their online case file so that their TCHP case manager and primary care physician can access it for continued, comprehensive care.

Public Health Significance

The Keep Fit Program provides an essential public health service to its members by informing them about obesity-related risks, educating them about eating nutritious and exercising daily, and empowering them to make changes toward a healthy lifestyle for their whole family. The program also mobilizes community-based resources such as YMCAs and public park programs to work together with case managers and physicians to provide supportive, holistic care for youth at risk for obesity-related conditions. My internship specifically linked overweight children referred by their physicians with the resources they needed to make healthy lifestyle changes. These resources included TCHP health educators, YMCA exercise instructors, a nutritionist, a Spanish-English translator, and case managers for ongoing care. Educating many families in a single community has the power to not only change the families in the program but might even help spread healthy lifestyle choices to others.

http://www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/

MyPlate displays the five food groups of a healthy diet in one simple visual.

Remember, half your plate should be fruits and vegetables!
Enhanced Stroke Recovery

Do prior activities effect the Outcome of occupational therapy in Post Stroke?

Bhim Upreti

In this summer, my practicum was at University of Texas Southwestern medical center at Dallas. A Faculty member of the University - Dr. Timea Hodics – led the team and designed the study. I worked on a project titled “tDCS-Enhanced Stroke Recovery and Cortical Reorganization.”

My duties were to review medical records, collect data, and analyze the findings for publication. Primary objective of this study is to find association between the outcome of occupational therapy (OT) and activities prior the OT session in stroke patients. Currently, we are at the end of data collection step and do not have any findings to present.

Public Health Significance

According to CDC, “about 130,000 Americans are dying from stroke every year. Stroke is a leading cause of death in the United States. Stroke is an important cause of disability and stroke costs the nation $ 38.6 billions annually, including the cost of health care services, medication, and lost productivity.” This report shows that stroke is a public health problem in the United States which affects not only patients it also affect family, community, and entire nation.

My practicum experience directly served to fulfill the following Public Health Essential Services: “Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems”.

So far, physical therapies are the mainstay of effective treatment options after stroke. Our study attempts to enhance the stroke recovery and cortical reorganization through a new stimulation treatment and appropriate time schedules among physical, occupational and speech therapies during a day.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

Choose your practicum subject which is your area of interest and will help in your future goal. Start planning your practicum few months in advance.

Practicum Highlight

I am able to recognize a problem and find a solution of that. I developed my leadership skills further.
By: Heather Fenley

Medical students at the Paul L Foster School of Medicine in El Paso, TX participate in 4 semesters of curriculum entitled Society, Community, and the Individual or SCI. This 2 year course highlights topics in public health including biostats/epidemiology, ethics, infectious disease, etc.

As part of this course I spent one half day a week assisting with patient care in a low-no cost clinic serving a

Public Health Significance

The clinic in which I spent time served to MONITOR the health status of the community and to INFORM and EDUCATE people about health issues, fulfilling 2 very important Essential Services of Public Health.

As an adjunct to my practicum experience at the Montana Vista Health Center and the SCI course at PLFSOM, I assisted promotoras in the El Paso community to educate citizens about colon cancer prevalence, risk factors, signs/symptoms, and screening methods in an initiative called ACCION. This program is EMPOWERING people to take charge of their colon health and take the steps to catch the disease early or prevent disease as much as possible. It also greatly aids the community by LINKING members who screened positively for colon cancer with essential follow up services and additional testing services needed to ensure a positive health outcome.
Community vs. Hospital-Acquired Infections

By: April M. Reyes, MLS (ASCP)

My experience in the health field and working as a microbiologist provides me firsthand access to data and a myriad of diseases. I have been designated the task to review each reportable since April till now. Each reportable must have the correct sample collection date. This is crucial in performing calculation rates in determining which infections are hospital-acquired. We are not concerned with community acquired infections.

The quarterly report was presented to the Infection Prevention and Control Committee.

The annual final report will be complete by the end of the next quarter. Although, updating reportable diseases is an everyday task.

Public Health Significance

In the world of healthcare and professionals, infection control has been a major concern for a period of time. The reporting of MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus) and VRE (Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococcus) in hospital-acquired infections has been thriving. Healthcare professionals need to be educated continuously about infection control measures and the demands required to prevent the spread of disease. This is where the department of infection control comes into play.

The infection control department at WBAMC monitors and investigates diagnosis depending on the disease and the site of collection. With the information, we can determine hospital-acquired infections and determine the contributing factors. We must decrease and eliminate these types of infections because of the lack of knowledge and lack of technique.

These certain contributing factors (i.e. healthcare professionals) can increase hospital costs and jeopardize the patient’s health.

Education is the backbone to the control and elimination of the spread of disease.

Special events/duties during your practicum

- After reviewing reportable diseases, I, along with the infection control nurse, were able to identify a few errors in blood culture collection sites.
- Infection control takes patience and meticulous work.

Lessons Learned

[OR] Advice for Future Students

- In the real-world, it is completely different when dealing with live patients. The scenarios presented in class are no comparison to identifying factors involving reportable diseases and acquired infections.

Hand washing is the number one preventative measure in infection control.
Public Health Significance

This project contributes to the Essential Public Health Service of “Research,” which finds “new insights and innovative solutions to health problems.”

The rate of aging in the United States is currently a major public health concern. It is predicted that there will be 72.1 million people over 65 in the US by 2030, with a increasing number of frail older adults as well. Older adults who are frail are at risk for health outcomes that impair quality of life such as hospitalization, falls, and increased risk of death. Additionally, healthcare costs of frail older adults are increased compared to non-frail older adults.

If it is determined that cellular senescence can predict the development of frailty, markers of senescence could provide therapeutic targets. Identifying new therapeutics could impact the quality of life of frail older adults by decreasing the impact of frailty, and potentially lowering the cost of their health care.

Cellular Senescence in Aging and Frailty

By: Amanda Cady

For my practicum I spent the summer working in the lab of Dr. Sara Espinoza at the Barshop Institute for Longevity and Aging studies studying the impact of cellular senescence on aging and frailty. The overall goal of this project is to determine if the level of cellular senescence in tissues can predict the development of frailty in an older adult. The diagnosis of frailty requires three of the following characteristics: exhaustion, weakness, unintentional weight loss, slow walking, and low physical activity levels.

In this step of the project, a mouse model of aging and frailty was used to measure the levels of markers of senescent cells using real-time reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction. The markers measured include markers of inflammation, a key factor linking cellular senescence and frailty.

The future work for this project includes measuring these same markers in the skin, fat, and muscle tissues of frail older adults.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

• Don’t be afraid to look for non-traditional practicum opportunities that lie within your particular public health area of interest.

• Take the time to appreciate the population you are working with in your practicum!

Sources:
Public Health Significance

Public health seeks to improve the well-being of populations, especially vulnerable populations. Refugees are indeed a vulnerable population in San Antonio.

My practicum experience has provided a number of public health essential services:

- Educating refugees on basic health knowledge and skills
- Researching the major health needs of newly arrived refugees
- Evaluating the adequacy of health access for refugees

The research I have conducted will better inform Catholic Charities in their efforts to support and connect refugees to improve their health. Supporting the health of this vulnerable population will contribute to their overall well-being - their ability to live healthy and productive lives.

Favorite Moments during Practicum

- Teaching health & wellness classes to newly arrived refugees
- Going through over 550 files of refugee client paper work
- Hearing multiple different language spoken each day
- Working with a diverse group of individuals

Global health is not so far away after all...

By: Nicole Eng

As a global health concentration student, I was excited to find global health needs in San Antonio. The city receives about 600 refugees each year, and many arrive with a number of health needs on top of little to no English skills or experience in living within an urban environment. Refugees are no doubt an often overlooked population in the city.

I have been spending my summer interning with the medical department of Catholic Charities’ Refugee Resettlement Program. Mostly, I have assisted with compiling a centralized database of their 2012-2013 clients and analyzing trends in their health needs and access. I have also taught health classes and did client visits for clients with pressing health needs.

Each day I recorded and organized their paper system of client records into a digital format. My end product will be a series of GIS maps to provide a visualization of the various health needs to clients and their accessibility to health care providers.

Advice for Future Students

Be observant and take time to reflect about your experience. Even if you feel you are not accomplishing much, you are actually learning a great deal if you take time to pay attention.
Practicum Highlights

- Expanded the camp from four days to a week
- Recruited 17 high school students for the program
- Involvement of UTSPH-SARC faculty, AHEC affiliates, the University of Texas Health Science at San Antonio faculty, and Metro Health staff

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Always show up on-time, or early
- Be organized and prepared
- Assign specific roles and responsibilities to camp coordinators
- Have fun 😊

Hosted by the South Central Area Health Education Center and the University of Texas School of Public Health- San Antonio Regional Campus

An SPH Student’s Dream: Public Health Summer Camp

By: Stephanie Mandujano

The third annual 2013 Summer Public Health Camp, a 5-day program hosted by the University of Texas School of Public Health- San Antonio Regional Campus (UTSPH-SARC) and the Area Health Education Center (AHEC), exposed San Antonio high school students in grades 10 to 12 to public health through presentations from professors and professionals in the field, hands-on activities, group work, a documentary, and field trips.

The planning process and program took place at the SARC, located in the Medical Center on the Northwest side of San Antonio.

I was involved in the recruitment, planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of the program. My final products include the actual 5-day program and a process evaluation describing the camp in detail.

Overall, the participants enjoyed all camp presentations and activities while learning about various public health topics.

Public Health Significance

The 2013 Summer Public Health Camp included key Public Health characteristics. The main Essential Services that was included was to inform, educate, and empower our participants about health issues.

Presentations and activities were selected to include a variety of Public Health core competencies while touching on the essential services.

Core competencies included

- Epidemiology
- Environmental Health
- Social and Behavioral Sciences
- Health Policy and Management

Emergency preparedness, global health, health disparities, military health, and infectious disease were also included in the program schedule.

*top logo from 2013 Summer Public Health Camp materials
Public Health Significance

Our project was specifically represented by the first Essential Public Health Service: Monitor health status to identify community health problems. The purpose of this survey was to initially observe and understand the needs of the Urbina Cantel community that we had been providing clinic services to for the past 3 years. Since Vamos Guatemala is relatively new, we decided to take the next step and work on assessing the current situation in terms of their WASH.

The data we collected help us determine what their current status is: most households hardly use soap, their latrines are rarely vented, and their trash is consistently burned. All of this puts the households at health risks that we would recommend presenting alternatives to prevent exposure to infectious diseases and toxic chemicals.

Additionally, we set up meetings with figures in the community to hopefully mobilize and sustain consistent efforts towards helping the health of the community.

Special events/duties during your practicum

- Dancing and playing with the girls at Hogar Luis Amigo
- Humbled by the patients’ demeanor as I butcher my Spanish trying to diagnose them

Advice for Future Students

- There are situations that can be frustrating jumping into a new community. Remind yourself to enjoy every little bit of it, even parts that may be frustrating. Be happy of the once-in-a-lifetime experience you were graciously provided.
By working for the PLAY (Please Look After Yourself) campaign I was able to contribute to a STD/HIV prevention campaign.

“Field” tasks included sex education classes at the San Antonio Juvenile Detention Center, assisting with condom distribution at unconventional locations, and street outreach in high risk areas.

“Office” tasks included performing literature reviews, grant writing, and data analysis. My final product was to develop a street intercept questionnaire and developing a database to input results.

Major findings are still in the process of being analyzed.

The PLAY campaign MONITORS health by focusing on increasing condom accessibility in select zip codes with high prevalence of STDs/HIV and low condom access (based off an environmental assessment of condom access). We also INFORM, EDUCATE, and EMPOWER communities through education sessions and attending targeted health fairs. Finally, the PLAY campaign RESEARCHES new solutions to increasing condom accessibility and use by EVALUATING the community through a variety of methods such as street intercept questionnaires.

The primary public health service offered by the PLAY campaign is though educational services. Here we go to locations with at-risk community members such as drug court or the juvenile detention center and deliver an evidenced based sex education course which has been specifically tailored for the selected populations.

Free condoms provided by the PLAY campaign.

Public Health Significance

Special events/duties/highlights during your practicum

Learning from CDC officers about grant writing.

People care. When doing street outreach a homeless man broke down and cried because the PLAY campaign staff showed we care and want to help.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Take advantage of the opportunity! Chances are if you ask for more responsibilities your preceptor they be able to provide you with additional responsibilities which adds to your “experience arsenal”.
South Texas Environmental Education and Research (STEER) immerses health professions students and faculty in the unique culture and environment of the Texas-Mexico Border. Our purpose is to reunite Medicine and Public Health (STEER, 2011).

Each summer, MD/MPH students from San Antonio head to Laredo and Harlingen to experience first-hand the intersection of public health and medicine through a real world study in environmental health. Read the summaries below to learn about the STEER program through the experiences of UTSPH students.

http://steer.uthscsa.edu/index.aspx
The Hispanic Paradox

Imma Achilike

The US Latino population is two times more likely to live in poverty compared to non-Latino whites (52% and 23.6% respectively). US Latinos are also three times more likely to lack health insurance (35% compared to 12%). However, there are reports of low infant mortality rates, lower reported cases of both diabetes and heart attacks. So when speaking of the Hispanic Paradox, it is in reference to the observation that since some risk factors are elevated when there is social and economic disadvantage, one would expect a higher mortality and morbidity in Hispanic populations. However, national mortality data suggest lower mortality for some socioeconomically disadvantaged Hispanics. Theories to explain this paradox are Acculturation, the Barrio advantage theory, the Healthy Migrant theory, and the Salmon effect.

Public Health Significance

Monitoring health status in the US Hispanic community is one way that my own project and my experiences during STEER related to the Essential Services of Public Health.

It is important to know about the Hispanic Paradox in order to identify effective community health interventions that can be modeled in other communities. The theories of the Hispanic Paradox may also extend to other immigrant populations who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

While at the UMBrownsville School of Public Health campus, we were educated about the efforts to reduce obesity and poor health outcomes in the area. It was amazing to see all the different avenues utilized to disseminate information on improving diet and increasing exercise activity.

Some of the means used to the word out included daily television morning reports, prime time radiobroadcasts, newsletters and the help of promotores.

Advice for Future Students

- Be open to learning as much as you can about the South Texas Hispanic culture.
- Don’t be afraid to ask questions about ways you could implement in your own community, interventions you learn at STEER.

Special events/duties during your practicum

- Healthcare disaster preparedness conference
- Superfund site
STEER Laredo Practicum Experience

Practicum Highlights

- Immersion experience in Laredo, a border town with unique health care opportunities and challenges
- Toured a local community health clinic
- Toured a local air quality monitoring station
- Toured the Colonias and spoke with two different families
- Collected water samples from the Rio Grande and measured various chemical and pollution levels
- Learned about natural remedies and their uses while hiking in the Laredo desert

Lessons Learned

Prior to arriving in Laredo, I wish I had done more research on the city, its population, and the many things it has to offer. Had I spent more time investigating prior to arriving in Laredo, I could have spent more time seeing things in the city, getting to know the people, and becoming fully immersed in an area that is far different from the area in which I was raised.

Image shows the Rio Grande and one of the bridges connecting Mexico and Laredo. It depicts the tremendous amount of material that crosses each day.

Laredo Practicum Experience Demonstrates Public Health issues in Laredo

By: Katrin Eurich

For my practicum experience, I traveled to Laredo, Texas as a part of the STEER program. While in this program, my goal was to learn more about health care at the border, how it differs from health care in other areas of the country, and what unique challenges the area faces when it comes to meeting the health care needs of the population.

The program was very conducive to this goal, as it introduced me to many aspects of health care in Laredo. I traveled to the Colonias to learn about their challenges, toured a community health clinic, and sat in on various presentations about the health care challenges and policies in the area. Even more interesting, I learned how Mexico’s activities across the river impacted the health of the population as well.

Public Health Significance

The Public Health Essential Service (PHES) that most closely related to this experience was “monitor health status to identify community health problems”. The majority of our time was spent investigating and monitoring various factors that affect the health of Laredo’s population as a whole. For example, we spent an entire day collecting water samples from the Rio Grande and measuring the amount of pollution in each part of the river. During this activity, we were able to see places where Mexico was still dumping into the river, a potential health hazard as the river provides the only source of water for the city. On another day, we went to an air monitoring station to see the levels of air pollution in Laredo. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that the air pollution levels in the city are quite low due to favorable winds and a smaller population. We also learned about the levels of crime in Laredo and across the border in Nuevo Laredo. It was interesting to see how criminal activity and the potential for it affects health care delivery in both areas. Overall, this experience offered many new factors to consider in my treatment of patients in clinic and in my career as a public health physician.
# Environmental Health on the U.S-Mexico Border

**STEER Program: Environmental and Rural Public Health on the Border**

**By: Elizabeth Frost**

My practicum was completed with the South Texas Environmental Education and Research (STEER) program. The focus of my practicum was to gain extensive knowledge about rural public health in the U.S-Mexico border region. The practicum was a month-long experience that combined fieldwork and coursework. It covered the following health topics which specifically affect the border region: rabies, dengue fever, Rio Grande water quality, air quality, herbicide and pesticide use, information on the bi-national public health efforts between Mexico and the U.S and access to health care for the uninsured or undocumented. My duties included collecting water samples, testing air quality, identifying environmental hazards in the community, and interviewing community health centers about access to care.

## Practicum Highlights
- Collecting water samples from the Rio Grande.
- Interviewing undocumented residents living in the colonías of Laredo.
- Receiving training on rabies eradication programs, dengue fever, water quality, air quality, toxic metals and other rural environmental public health topics.

## Advice for Future Students
Your practicum is a chance to explore various public health topics, and it is an opportunity to grow as a public health professional. Don’t be afraid to do a practicum that makes you step outside your comfort zone and expands your boundaries. A practicum can be challenging as well as fun.

## Public Health Significance

The practicum relates to three of the Essential Services of Public Health: educate, monitor, and mobilize. The goal of STEER is to educate health professionals on environmental health and to create an awareness of health problems specific to the border region. It does so by offering this environmental border health program. Participants in the STEER program monitor the health status of the border region communities by collecting water samples, testing air quality and working alongside the Laredo Health Department to identify health concerns. STEER mobilizes community health clinics, the Laredo Health Department, the Laredo City Council, the Mexican Ministry of Health, and other health professionals and students to come together in managing and addressing border health issues. STEER has created an umbrella under which all of these participants cooperate and move forward to improve health conditions along the border.
STEER educates and empowers

A firsthand look at border health
- Bi-national conference on Border Health
- Experience in the colonias of South Texas
- Talk with field experts!

Global Health in your own backyard
- STEER really helps you to recognize that many people in the US do not have access to running water, electricity, or health care
- This practicum makes you think about preventive medicine from all aspects

STEER: Bringing Global Health Education to South Texas

By: Rebecca Hernandez

The South Texas Environmental Education and Research (STEER) program helps students learn about the different factors that affect health.

In Laredo, Texas, we examined public health from many different angles. We covered subjects from Rabies to herbs to mosquito-borne diseases.

The best experiences during the STEER rotation really involved the people in Laredo. The experts and residents we talked to were all knowledgeable and welcoming. This contributed tremendously to our education.

Some of the most informative and useful public health issues covered focused on testing the water quality of the Rio Grande, the only water source for people in Laredo, Texas, studying herbal medicine, and providing care to people in the colonias.

Public Health Significance

STEER focuses on empowering and educating students about environmental and public health. While the program was created for public health and medical students, STEER also serves to educate members of the community to take control of their health.

STEER is a very important addition to the community in Laredo. The program covers a very wide range of topics and serves to provide education about environmental and public health.

Source: Texas A&M International University
Access to Healthcare on the US-Mexico Border

By: Andy Ho

This past June, I spent the month in Laredo, TX, had some extremely interesting experiences, and gained quite a bit of useful perspective.

As a part of the South Texas Education & Research (STEER) rotation in Laredo, we surveyed various aspects of public health and specifically, environmental health. With lectures and fieldwork sessions that spanned everything from water treatment & landfill operations to community health centers & a binational conference on border health to trips to unincorporated communities & the Rio Grande, every day yielded a different perspective on important topics.

The border continues to be neglected and may pose major problems if nothing is done to remedy its many problems. While policy changes remain at a standstill, American citizens continue to suffer.

Public Health Significance

According to the set of 10 essential public health services, our STEER rotation clearly fulfills both numbers 3 and 10. These include: “inform, educate, and empower” and “research.”

STEER not only educates the students who are a part of the rotation, but its faculty has substantial contributions to the local community. A few examples include the numerous collaborations to run campaigns for health education via promotoras, lay-people with specialized health education training.

The STEER faculty also has close ties to the health department and brings along decades of experience in the application of public health.

The training provided to the students choosing to go on the STEER rotation is essential to expand the awareness of the myriad of public health issues in South Texas and on a greater scale, the US-Mexico border.

While this area is largely forgotten, health issues here can yield major problems to the rest of the country if left untended.

Select Highlights

- During the first week of the rotation, the US-Mexico Regional Binational Health Conference: Diseases and Emergencies Updates was held at theUTHSCSA Laredo Regional Campus.
- On the latter half of the rotation, we took water samples from the Rio Grande and cultured them for fecal coliform & E.coli

Recommendations

The Laredo STEER rotation is highly recommended for future MPH students. The US-Mexico border is a very unique area both politically and health-wise. During this month, you’ll see major issues discussed on a national scale first-hand (immigration, border safety, etc)

Colonias represent an extremely underserved population in the United States (Photo: Andy Ho)

Laredo is the largest land-port in North America. (Photo: Andy Ho)
The colonias are of particular concern since their residents can be faced with public health challenges the general population is not.

Many of the homes lack access to running water and sewage lines (although this has improved over the last few years). In addition, most lie on a flood plain that forces residents to vacate during heavy rainfalls, particularly during hurricane season. It is during this season that people are not only forced to vacate their homes and find shelter elsewhere (many roads remain unpaved and water levels make the area inaccessible), but they are also exposed to the various vector-borne diseases associated with sitting water as well as other exposures due to overflow of outhouses and manure runoff from horses or farm animals in the area.
Community Health Workers

STEER Highlights

- Cultural Sensitivity Presentation with visit to La Michoacana
- Visit to the Green Valley Farms Colonia
- Community Outreach Program Overview in Harlingen, TX
- Mano a Mano program overview and home visits with promotoras

Lessons Learned

STEER provided me with an essential set of tools that I would not have otherwise received from my medical school education. I have honestly learned the importance and impact of empowering my patients and genuinely understanding the true needs of patients including nutritional, environmental and social components. I will be forever grateful for this experience and wholeheartedly believe I will be a better physician because of it.

Community Health Workers:

By: Andrea Richardson

STEER provided numerous opportunities to learn cultural competency, the relationship between environmental exposures and health and the public health role of community health workers. Visits with promotoras to provide preventative health education, including maternal health and diabetes education, as well as social support to immigrants allowed students to directly witness the importance of community health workers in our healthcare system.

Such prevention measures are exceedingly important in Harlingen, Texas, as obesity and consequently diabetes well exceed national averages. Because the promotoras genuinely understand the needs of the individuals within the community and are able to develop trustworthy relationships, they are able to connect them to healthcare services that they may be unlikely to seek out otherwise.

Public Health Significance

Informing, educating and empowering individuals about health serves as the Public Health Essential Service that most closely relates to both the STEER program and the role of promotoras. Promotoras and other community health workers increase access to care in underserved populations and serve as a source of follow-up care that is often foregone. Additionally, such workers allow health organizations to extend their services and better respond to the needs of their patients. However, promotoras are special in that their personal involvement within the community allows them to genuinely understand patient challenges and relate such challenges to other healthcare professionals.

Lastly, by giving community individuals the tools to help manage chronic disease and other health issues, they empower individuals to take charge of their lives and further inspire them to become leaders within their community.
Gladys Porter Zoo at Brownsville, TX

Public Health Gone Wild!

By: Kent Swimley

As part of the STEER program, the group visited the Gladys Porter Zoo at Brownsville, TX on June 12, 2013. We were first taken to a conference room to be given a background of Dr. Thomas de Maar’s story and well as the significance his job has as head veterinarian has on public health. We later received a behind-the-scenes tour of Dr. de Maar’s surgical ward and got a glimpse at his medicinal archive.

Look at public health from the perspective of the Earth.

- The trip to the Gladys Porter Zoo in Brownsville was an amazing, eye-opening, behind-the-scenes experience that is definitely unique to the STEER Program!

Tour of the Zoo

- Saw the surgical ward of the zoo.
- Interacted with recovering animals.

Public Health Significance

This practicum experience falls into not only monitoring the health status of a given community to identify community health problems, but also served to inform, educate, and empower us as participants about health issues involving animal health and zoonotic diseases.

Most people do not realize how important it is for zoos to keep their animals healthy and to closely monitor them as a means to prevent a zoonotic outbreak. With this in mind, zoos serve as an early detection system for zoonotic infections that may arise within a metropolitan area.

Gladys Porter Zoo at Brownsville, TX

Dr. Thomas de Maar instructing STEER participants of the measures they take to isolate sick animals. Image provided by STEER.

The STEER group interacting with an elderly chinchilla held by Dr. Thomas de Maar. Graphic provided by STEER.
Health on the Border - STEER Experience

By: Emily Wasson

During my STEER experience this past summer we were privileged to get a glimpse into the challenges that are facing health professionals on the border.

The border provides a host of complex situations, many of which play a role in the health of the communities on either side. During our four weeks we were able to peek into many aspects of these challenges, including the challenges of bi-national public health surveillance, poverty, large uninsured populations, and the struggle to find a way to make major differences with very limited funding.

There is encouragement to be found in the fact that despite a host of complicated situations there have been some amazing successes, such as the Promotora program that have empowered many communities to take steps toward healthier tomorrows.

Unique Challenges of Health on the Border

- Diagnose and investigate health problems and health hazards in the community - We met with public health department members who investigate possible health hazards and challenges.
- Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems - There are some excellent research projects underway at the ERAHC as well as the School of Public Health.
- Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues - There are several organizations on the border that have put a lot of emphasis on this. Programs of note are the Promotora programs, Projecto Juan Diego and Projecto Azteca that have a heavy emphasis on empowerment and educational outreach programs.

Public Health Significance

This experience was very significant in that it touched on all ten of the essential public health services. We visited so many different organizations and spoke with so many public health players. Some of the highlights were:

Special Events

- The STEER group was invited to participate in a Disaster Preparedness conference with health professionals from the border area.
- We were able to meet with and shadow some of the highly influential Promotoras that have had such a public health impact on the border area.

Lessons Learned

- Health on the border is a dynamic experience. There are many people and agencies working together from a variety of angles, in order to address the many public health challenges of the region. Progress is being made, but there are still many opportunities to make a difference.

One of our trips took us out to visit the wall that has been going up in phases along the border. Seeing the wall first hand was an eye-opening experience to the realities of life on the border. Photo Credit – Dr. Noe Garza

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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/