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 gain a deeper understanding of public health practice, interact with professionals in the field, and expand their repertoire of professional skills.

This 18th edition e-magazine showcases student practicum experiences throughout the Fall 2015 semester. Prior editions may be accessed on the practicum website at https://sph.uth.edu/academics/public-health-practice/#tabs-2 (click on the Reports tab)
## Practicum Topics

### Houston

*Number of Students: 10*

### Management, Policy and Community Health

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Direct Acting Anti-Virals and HCV

**Practicum Highlights**

- I was delighted to have Dr. Rowan as my preceptor who took out the time to help me navigate through a topic which was fairly new to me.

- I had an opportunity to publish my article in an indexed medical journal and had an opportunity to add to the limited literature available on the topic.

**Advice for Future Practicum Students**

- Start looking for a practicum as soon as possible
- Treat each practicum opportunity as your potential job.
- Always discuss opportunities with friends and faculty.
- Always explore new areas to challenge yourself.

**Oral Direct Acting Antiviral for the treatment of HCV infections.**

Source: [http://www.medpagetoday.com/Mee tingCoverage/EASL /51208](http://www.medpagetoday.com/Mee tingCoverage/EASL /51208)

**Psychosocial assessment and monitoring in the new era of non-interferon-alpha hepatitis C virus treatments**

**By: Nizar Bhulani MD**

At UTSPH, MPACH Division, I participated in a research project which involved literature review of the current treatment options for HCV infections with a focus on the new direct acting non-interferon antivirals. I reviewed the literature on the current treatment options available for HCV and their psychological side effects profile. I was able to develop an outline of an article for a peer review journal. This article talks about the recently approved drug combinations which have shown better efficacy, shorter treatment times and relatively benign side effects profiles. The article highlights how depression has not emerged as a side effect of this regime. The article concludes that these drugs regimens could pave way to improved recruitment of HCV infected patients with psychological co-morbidities and may also leads to reduced need for strong psychological assessment and monitoring at the start of treatment.

**Public Health Significance**

This practicum experience relates to the following essential services of public health:

1. Inform, educate and empower people (physicians and patients) about public health issues
2. Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems.

The public health relevance of this project was such that HCV infections are a global concern with approximately 170 million people affected by it around the world. It is the leading cause of liver cirrhosis in the developed countries. The standard for treatment, that is, Interferon-alpha, has only 40% success rate. However, due to its side effects profile, patients must be screened for psychological conditions before treatment is started. As much as 70% of otherwise eligible patients are denied treatment due to co-morbidity contraindications.
Community Engagement & Health Impact Assessment

Improving Health and Equity Through the Built Environment

By: Sara Fares

I completed my practicum with Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services, working within the Build Environment and Health Impact Assessment Unit on two ongoing Health Impact Assessments (HIA) in Pasadena and in East Aldine Management District. The purpose of each HIA is to investigate methods in which health considerations can be included in the decision making process when it comes to community planning.

Public Health Significance

The essential public health services most prominently addressed by the HIAs include:

Monitor health status to identify and solve community health problems.

Key informant interviews, focus groups, and surveys were some key methods of gathering qualitative data on the key health, safety, and mobility issues and poor health outcomes most relevant and vital to each community.

Mobilize community partnerships and action to identify and solve health problems.

The built environment influences many health outcomes through physical activity, healthy food access and consumption, and exposure to harmful environmental or air pollutants. How communities are designed and which health issues are considered or not during the building process directly affects the healthy, safety, access, and mobility issues that a community will face.

Partnerships and healthy stakeholder relationships take a vital role in any HIA. In our HIAs key informant interviews are conducted with stakeholders in the community that work and/or live in the community, come from a variety of backgrounds and expertise, and have an extensive knowledge of the community’s health and safety needs. Essential partners and stakeholders included The Episcopal Health Foundation of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, COP planning departments, and EAD board of directors and subcommittees amongst others.

Duties during practicum:

- I helped investigate and draft a protocol for including qualitative GIS and PhotoVoice methods.
- I was included in several key informant interviews with professionals from varying backgrounds in the assessed communities including ISD members, health clinic directors, community based organization directors, amongst others.
- We collected data in the form of surveys and community mapping from events such as the East Aldine Fall Festival and from three focus groups conducted with retirees and parents of school aged children.
- I got the opportunity to facilitate one of the focus groups as well. I then used qualitative data software such as NVivo to begin coding the interviews conducted.
Managing Chronic Disease Among Adults

By: Christelle Hernandez

The major health topic addressed at the clinical site was Diabetes management.

The clinic site permitted direct contact with adult populations who had uncontrolled diabetes and required complex disease management. The student was able to address such health issues and prescribe and modify the plan of care based on the patient’s needs.

Public Health Significance

Research to new insights and innovative solutions to health problems was the public health service that related mostly to the major project completed at the clinical site. Direct patient contact and management of chronic disease including diabetes overlapped across many of the health care services, but discovering the positive effect that community based health care interventions have on diabetes outcomes was the greatest public health significance.

As diabetes continues to rise in incidence and prevalence in America, it is essential to understand the benefits of resources outside of pharmacological measures. Delivering care and supervision directly to the community holds much promise to the future of diabetes among Hispanic adults, as current research indicates there is a positive relationship between community-based interventions and diabetes outcomes.

Special events/duties during your practicum

- Managing medication modifications at 3-month intervals based on lab results
- Making specialist referrals for special health needs

Lessons Learned

- Never assume every patient is the same, look at the patient as a new case each time, starting from the beginning with the goal remaining the same, to help each on sustain the best health possible.
Reducing Lapses in Care amongst Young Adults

Formalizing the Transition Process to Adult Care
By: Kierra Lee

There is not an effective formal process to transition Texas Children Hospital’s (TCH) patients from pediatric to adult care. As a result, TCH provides care to several elderly patients. Even more alarming, there is a large population that loses their health coverage as they move into adulthood, resulting in a lapse of healthcare.

TCH created a steering committee that includes several key employees of the hospital (i.e. physicians, a vice-president, directors, social workers, etc.). Ambulatory departments present to the steering committee on their efforts on transitioning patients.

My assignment was to work with the Senior Project Manager to create and organize a SharePoint website that displayed all the data, resources, and findings presented to the steering committee.

TCH is still in the early stages of developing a transition process. In years to come, the transition process at TCH will be able to reduce lapses in care and move patients out of pediatric care. I was involved in the beginning process that will achieve the desired health outcomes.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience undertakes the framework for the NPHPS instruments as they: research new insights and innovative solutions to transition medicine. During the steering committee meetings, the group explores the barriers to care and possible solutions. TCH works with Baylor College of Medicine and they are linking people to needed personal health services.

TCH is working to find doctors that would take on chronically ill adult patients.

TCH also plans to mobilize community partnerships to help patients receive “gold cards” or other forms of public healthcare insurance. This will help with patients that are subject to lose their healthcare coverage as they enter adulthood.

Practicum Highlights

- Created reports and SharePoint sites for use by the Vice-President of Ambulatory Services
- Applied Donobedian’s quality improvement tools to reduce patient wait times.
- Networked with Project Managers, Directors, and Practice Administrators.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Your practicum is the best opportunity to gain real world experience. At your internship, volunteer for projects that seem difficult. You will be surprised at how much you will learn.
- Always have an “elevator speech” describing your career aspirations. After spending several years in school, people expect you to have some idea about your future goals.
Partnership in tough times to address health issues.

By: Nicole Lievsay

In September 2015, the Harris Health System (Harris Health) Board of Managers voted to change the definition of “indigent”, which determines eligibility for free health care services, from 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL) to 150% of FPL. Patients that fall above 150%FPL will now be assessed for eligibility for ACA insurance coverage. Those that are not eligible will have the option to enroll in a pay-as-you-go plan called My Harris Health or move to “self pay” status. “Claims” for the My Harris Health program will be managed through Community Health Choice (Community).

Community is a sister organization to Harris Health and is a Managed Care Organization. My role has been to work with Community to plan for the addition of these new patients to their system. Essentially, I have acted as a project manager working with the Chief Operating Officer. The final product will be a project plan. Issues addressed during this project have included IT connectivity, contracting, care management services and denials of service. One of the main goals is to discover better ways to support patients in managing their health status and ensuring they get more consistent and preventative care. Outcomes are still at least a year away. Implementation begins March 1st.

PHOTO: Healthcare financing is complex with multiple issues converging to impact patients’ ability to access care.


Need to Know

- Plan early.
- Learn the relevant stakeholders quickly.
- Financial decisions have a huge impact on access to care.
- Financial projects do not just involve financial staff. Include IT, direct service personnel, and organizational leadership.
- Document, document, document along the way.

Public Health Significance

This project related to these three essential services of public health.
(http://www.cdc.gov/nphpsp/essentialservices.html)

1. Monitor health status to identify and solve community health problems.
2. Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues.
3. Mobilize community partnerships and action to identify and solve health problems.

Community Health Choice and Harris Health System have partnered to ensure that a change in financial designation does not change access to quality care. (#3)

Utilizing existing and improved care and utilization management capabilities, both Community and Harris Health will have more information available to support patients in understanding their health status and educate them on practical choices to improve their overall health. (#1 and #2)
Public Health Significance

Performing controlled trials of diagnostic imaging studies is challenging due to the rarity of important adverse events, the complexities involved with family decision-making, and limited funding sources. Decision-analytic modeling is an invaluable tool for estimating long-term outcomes, which can be used by stakeholders to make more informed decisions.

The Public Health Essential Services this project most closely addresses are:

- Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues
- Evaluate effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services

My work this summer is part of a larger project that we hope will provide information to help physicians and parents make informed decisions regarding the most appropriate imaging modality for children requiring cancer surveillance.
**Healthcare Quality Improvement**

**Improving Hospital Outcomes and Patient Safety**

By: Thea Papasozomenos

Preventable medical errors (PME) compromise patient safety and account for a significant number of adverse events in healthcare settings. Some reports estimate that PMEs contribute to the deaths of 210,000 to 440,000 patients each year, making it the third leading cause of death in the US.

Palmetto Health, the largest healthcare system in the South Carolina Midlands Region, employs many strategies to improve patient safety through its Corporate Quality and Infection Control Department.

I worked on a variety of projects, including improving glycemic control in the hospital setting and a new project to minimize opioid-related adverse events.

**Public Health Significance**

Palmetto Health performs many Public Health Essential Services (PHES) to promote safer healthcare delivery including:

1) Diagnosis and Investigation: Palmetto Health does surveillance, monitoring and determining the cause of adverse events such as hospital-acquired infections.

2) Evaluation: problems are identified and strategies developed to improve current processes. The hospital developed strategies to decrease hospital central line-associated blood stream infections (CLABSI).

3) System Management/Research: when trying to improve a process, research is conducted to identify best-practices, including reviewing the literature and protocols of other healthcare systems.

**References:**


**Lessons Learned**

There are many projects to get involved with, such as hospital infection control and ensuring compliance with CMS measures. Pick something that really interests you.

**Image:** [https://www.palmettohealth.org/patients-guests/palmetto-news/logos](https://www.palmettohealth.org/patients-guests/palmetto-news/logos)
Addressing Vaccine-Preventable Diseases

Increasing Immunization Rates in Texas through Provider Education

By: Michelle Pichardo

The Immunization Partnership (TIP), works from its base in Houston to serve the immunization needs of Texas. The organization focuses on education, advocacy, and supporting immunization best practices.

As the Graduate Assistant for Educational Programming, it was my responsibility to work with community partners and assist in the planning of 3 educational events for immunization stakeholders in Houston, Williamson County, and Victoria.

The topic of focus for these events was either HPV or Pertussis. The target audience consisted primarily of physicians, nurses, and other healthcare providers.

The events aim to educate attendees about related diseases and available vaccines, as well as suggest communication strategies for appropriately addressing and communicating with vaccine hesitant individuals and parents.

Public Health Significance

The Immunization Partnership (TIP) addresses 9 out of 10 Essential Services of Public Health. The only Essential Service not covered by TIP is “enforce laws and regulations that protect health and ensure safety.”

For my practicum, I primarily focused on the Essential Services of:

- Monitor health status to identify and solve community health problems.
- Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues.
- Mobilize community partnerships and action to identify and solve health problems.
- Assure competent public and personal health care workforces.

Mobilizing community partnerships was a vital part of my work at TIP. Without community partners, it would have been impossible to organize these events and thus address the health needs of the community.

Lessons Learned

- Something I learned is that working with community partners, particularly physicians, can be difficult and tricky on many levels. Flattery and genuine enthusiasm can go a long way.

Duties during my practicum:

- Researching community needs
- Developing event learning objectives
- Identifying and recruiting speakers
- Securing venues and catering
- Designing promotional and educational materials
- Developing an evaluation tool to assess each event

Adolescent girl visits a pediatrician to receive the HPV vaccine.

Source: CDC’s Public Health Image Library
http://phil.cdc.gov/phil/home.asp

Mother and child visit a pediatrician for an immunization visit.

Source: CDC’s Public Health Image Library
http://phil.cdc.gov/phil/home.asp
I was part of a high energy team focused on reducing the risk of venous thromboembolism (VTE) at Houston Methodist Hospital. We used the Patient Safety Initiative (PSI) reports to drill down on events and evaluate the systems of care provided. I have the responsibility to report these findings to the weekly committee meeting.

We discussed the prophylaxis for VTE, risk assessment completion, and contraindication.

I was able to identify the strategies used in the care of the patient, and report on any potential improvements that I recognized that would help decrease the risk of a VTE event.

This was an experience in evaluating the care provided to the patients admitted to Houston Methodist Hospital. As part of this team I was able to investigate problems/hazards within the care of the patient and address them through system changes.

Information obtained in this process was used to implement a new VTE risk assessment. The new risk tool will ensure that every patient is screened and prophylaxis is initiated. This will help to reduce the risk of a VTE occurring.

A VTE event contributes to morbidity and mortality, and prevention of these events is key to the safety of the patient. If a patient develops a VTE, the anticoagulant used to treat the clot can have significant bleeding risk to the patient.

A patient should not develop a VTE during hospitalization, and Houston Methodist Hospital has systems in place to prevent them, with upfront screening, evidence base prophylaxis, and patient education when anticoagulation is needed.
Medical Camp with Nepali Refugees

Practicum Highlights

- Total Flu Shots: 109 Immunized
- Blood Pressure: 88 Screened Total (65 counseled on diet and exercise, 22 referred to PCP)
- Glucose: 78 Screened (47 educated)

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Live in the moment and enjoy it. When planning a practicum, it is so easy to get lost in the details of ensuring everything is running smoothly and executing properly. I wish I slowed down more to take in the moments because it is all over so quickly.

Public Health Significance

A Public Health Essential Service that closely relates to my practicum experience is to mobilize community partnerships and action, to identify and solve health problems.

My practicum project was able to assess the health of this population allowing us to screen, educate, and ultimately prevent diseases from occurring.

There were cases of individuals that were borderline stroke, who were then immediately educated on lifestyle changes. From this project, many ideas were formulated to serve a greater population size for the next time this is conducted.

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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/