Public Health Practice

Stories from the Field
The University of Texas School of Public Health
Student Practicum Experiences
Spring 2015 – Regional Campuses
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 sixteenth-edition e-magazine showcases student practicum experiences throughout the Spring 2015 semester. (Prior semesters may be accessed through the e-book, a collection of student abstracts and e-magazines describing their experiences.)
# Practicum Topics

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## Austin Regional Campus

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## Dallas Regional Campus

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## San Antonio Regional Campus

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<td>Community Health Status Assessment</td>
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<td>Malignant Cutaneous Melanoma</td>
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Environmental Health along the Border
Calen Kucera
Legislature in Action

The Power to Impact Health of Texans

By: Aida Alibegovic

By working for a Representative who sits on the Public Health Committee, I became exposed to a variety of concerns constituents were impacted with daily. With great honor I got to speak to Texans who shared their health issues, come up with bill ideas, and analyze bills heard in Public Health Committee.

A catalyst for the bill I drafted was a brain-dead and pregnant woman. Currently a brain-dead woman cannot be disconnected from mechanical ventilation, despite her advance directives, if she is pregnant. My job was to research model legislation, come up with recommendations on altering the current law, and guide legislative council in writing the bill.

Texas State Capitol pictured above. Photo courtesy of State Preservation Board: http://www.tspb.state.tx.us/SPB/capitol/texcap.htm

Public Health Significance

There are many Public Health Services that Texas Legislature influences. The most apparent being developing policies that support individual and community health efforts. In the past sessions legislation was passed, for example, to award money to science centers, to making wearing of seat belts mandatory, and to legalize telemedicine.

This session has not seen a shortage of bills referred to Public Health Committee. I have spoken with epileptic patients who believe marijuana to be effective in stopping seizures and who have found a Representative to sponsor that bill. I have spoken with LGBT groups who are trying to change adoption birth certificate to include names of both same-sex parents instead of current “mother” and “father” names. And I have talked to those who are trying to amend vaccine registry so children who do not sign an adult consent form at 18 years of age are not deleted from the registry when they turn 19. All my meetings are noted and presented to the Chief of Staff who shares them with the Representative. With enough favorable votes, good bills become good laws.

Pictured above: Representative Nicole Collier (middle), Representative’s Chief of Staff Jacob Limon (left), and Aida Alibegovic (right). Photo by Aida Alibegovic

Practicum highlights

• Sitting in on Public Health Committee hearings listening to reasons for and against bills in question
• Opportunity to network with lobbyists, stakeholders, and individuals working for other House members

Advice for Future Practicum Students

• Observe as much as you can of how the organization you are working for is run, organized, influenced, and changed
Public Health Policy in Texas

Texas’ 84th Legislative Session: Public Health Intern

By: Chelsea David-Nickolay

I worked in the capitol office of Representative Nicole Collier as her public health intern. I found this opportunity through UT-SPH emails and followed through by contacting the chief of staff, interviewing, and accepting this position.

One focus of the 84th session concerning public health was the regulation of ENDS (electronic nicotine delivery system) products. Rep. Collier filed HB 646 to regulate access of these products to minors. I assisted by conducting thorough research of potential health effects, meeting with stakeholders, and evaluating current law in other states.

In addition to my work on HB 646, my primary duties included: completing weekly Internal Backgrounds, preparing floor binders, staffing committee hearings, and contacting constituents. My “final product” was a collection of all the Internal Backgrounds I created during session.

Public Health Significance

“Develop policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts.”

The quote above is one of the 10 Essential Public Health Services that most closely related to my practicum experience.

My work on HB 646 was an effort to implement policy prohibiting the sale of ENDS products to minors. The adverse health effects of these products are not fully understood. However, limiting access to minors may prevent the development of addictive behaviors or potential transition to conventional tobacco products.

Furthermore, Representative Collier was a committee member on the Public Health Committee. Members of the Texas legislature worked tirelessly throughout the interim and legislative session to research, draft, file, and ultimately pass bills intended to improve public health. The public health committee worked diligently with each bill to ensure public health safety and improvement.
Communication Strategies for Reducing Vaccine Hesitancy

By: Morgan Garrison

I am completing my practicum at Texas Medical Association (TMA) as a community outreach assistant. Being involved in TMA’s Hard Hats for Little Heads and Be Wise-Immunize programs, I’ve assisted with community outreach events, collected program data, and written news releases.

Hard Hats for Little Heads bicycle helmet giveaway program is dedicated to reducing head injuries among Texas children. Likewise, the Be Wise-Immunize program works to improve vaccination rates in Texas through education and immunization clinics.

My practicum extends into the summer and therefore my final product is still underway. However, the goal is to demonstrate, possibly through video or PowerPoint, how physicians can effectively communicate with patients about the safety, efficacy, and importance of getting vaccinated.

Public Health Significance

I am based in the Department of Communications and Division of Media and Public Relations, whose main essential public health services include:

1) Informing, educating, and empowering people about health issues
2) Mobilizing community partnerships to identify and solve health problems
3) Linking people to needed personal health services and assuring the provision of health care when otherwise unavailable.

TMA’s Be Wise-Immunize program, and thus my project, addresses the highly debated issue of vaccine hesitancy. TMA educates not only the public, but also provides physicians with a range of tools to assist them with education and promotion efforts. Resources include, but are not limited to, continuing medical education courses and vaccination toolkits. To further these efforts, my project educates physicians on communication practices that may have a positive or negative influence on a patient’s decision to get vaccinated.
Adolescent LARC Adherence

By: Lauren Camille Jackson

My research work focused on determinants of long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) adherence among adolescents. I conducted a literature review and reviewed People’s Community Clinic (PCC) EHRs and EMRs to learn about their patients. As part of my practicum, I observed PCC health educators during patient consultations. This informed me of the patient-centered methods used to educate patients about contraception and the challenges associated with community health care.

For my final product, I wrote a report on what kinds of LARCs and family planning services PCC patients choose and why PCC patients and teens in general seek early removal. Many patients seek early removal because they desire pregnancy or due to side effects attributed to LARCs such as bleeding irregularities and cramping.

Public Health Significance

My practicum was most directly related to the research essential service of public health. I researched what factors influence adolescents’ decisions to seek early LARC removal. From my research, I was able to develop a framework that PCC can use to conduct more extensive and rigorous research for publication. This included a hypothesis that adolescents whose expectations match their experiences will have better adherence rates as well as survey questions informed by the literature.

There is little information available in the literature regarding adolescent LARC adherence. In order to improve reproductive healthcare and policies, it is necessary to learn more about adolescent LARC adherence. Improving LARC adherence can be particularly challenging in clinics that provide patient-centered care like PCC, and further research can inform these clinics how best to educate patients and improve health outcomes.

Practicum Duties

• Part of my practicum consisted of shadowing health educators during their contraceptive counseling sessions with patients.
• I gained extensive experience working with EHRs and EMRs to glean insights about PCC patients.

Lessons Learned

• Communication with preceptors and advisors is the key element of a successful practicum. This will ensure that your project is not only moving in the right direction but also meaningful throughout the duration of your practicum.
New Non-Profit, Proven Concept

By: Christine Jovanovic
The Coordinated Approach to Child Health, or CATCH, has been global for several years, but only recently has its name reflected both its reach and its mission. Now a non-profit, CATCH Global provided me the opportunity to support its work creating healthier communities, using schools as the locus of influence.

My job was to analyze data to support a budget rider asking for $5 million to fund School Health Program grants. Organizing Free and Reduced Lunch rates as a proxy measure for economic disadvantage allowed CATCH to suggest a 30% FRL eligibility criteria for the proposed funding. In addition, I was also tasked with analyzing implementation data across Texas and creating presentations, and with outreach to school board members and district leadership throughout the state.

Inform, Educate and Empower

Of the 10 Essential Services of Public Health described by the CDC, the CATCH Global Foundation most clearly supports the need to “inform, educate and empower people about health issues.” In my Practicum, I was able to support that mission by providing data that may inform state funding as advocated by CATCH, and created materials that illustrated CATCH implementation levels in schools in the Rio Grande Valley and Port Isabel. The level of engagement at the CATCH schools was graphically illustrated in photos of health messages in cafeterias and in school hallways, and the collaborative nature of CATCH was apparent in the partnerships supporting these efforts that spanned many sectors, from private healthcare providers to nonprofit foundations and local businesses. As the research has shown, a coordinated approach can lead to real improvements in school and community health.

Healthy Coach Hotline

Coaching Texas to Better Health!

By: Joshua Klaus

While working with It’s Time Texas (ITT), a non-profit designed to provide physical activity and nutrition education to Texas, we worked on designing a pilot study to provide individuals with motivational interviewing/coaching to facilitate healthy lifestyle changes.

ITT partnered with United Way to use their 211 hotline to allow callers to be divided into a control group, receiving health education materials by mail or e-mail, or into a variable group, which received the same materials plus motivational interviewing.

ITT firmly believes that motivational interviewing will empower individuals to take action for their health and carry that action into their communities!

Highlights
- IRB approved our study so that we could officially begin the pilot study!
- We received our first call from Dallas in April!

Public Health Significance

The goal at ITT is to empower people to lead healthier lives and build healthier communities. This mission allows ITT to inform, educate and empower people about health issues as well as mobilize community partnerships and action to identify and solve health problems. We believe the power to change must come from the individual who will spread it to his or her community. Together, we can make a healthier Texas. Together, we can make a healthier world.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

Your ideas MATTER. Your passion, your input, your work ethic, your kindness, and your patience make a project fun to work on and beneficial to those you are trying to reach.

Make Healthy Easier

Motto for ITT in Public Schools

http://www.growinghealthyschools.org/sites/default/files/ITT_lockup_horiz.png


**Practicum Highlights**

- Attended the TX Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy Conference in San Antonio on April 13-14
- Presented a portion of the needs assessment report to a group of 50 local service providers at HYP’s January workshop

**Needs Assessment Report Writing and Promotions**

*By: Katelyn McKerlie*

Healthy Youth Partnership (HYP) conducted a needs assessment of teen pregnancy prevention services in Travis County, TX. As HYP’s intern I developed and assisted on the writing of several sections of the report, transitioning it into a finished product. I also developed the promotions plan for the report, which includes a press release, a 1 pager, 5-6 pager, infographics and a 6 week social media campaign that targets specific audiences. These products illustrate the findings and recommendations of the report so that HYP can successfully educate, empower and mobilize organizations, community members and policymakers to address teen pregnancy prevention efforts in Travis County. The report, and promotional materials will be distributed at HYP’s service provider conference and at the TX Capitol.

**Public Health Significance**

Healthy Youth Partnership (HYP) seeks to mobilize community partnerships and action to identify and solve health problems through dissemination of a needs assessment report assessing the barriers, strengths, and community recommendations around pregnancy prevention in Travis County, TX. This report recommends working with youth, parents and caregivers and developing policies to improve teen pregnancy prevention services.

**“A Pearl of Wisdom”**

Something I learned from my experience is to not assume that everyone you work with has the same knowledge/skills as you do. Don’t be afraid to “step up to the plate” and utilize what you have learned in school! An MPH education is a valuable education especially in a field as diverse adolescent health promotion.
Fighting Against Childhood Obesity

Senate Bill 952: A legislative stand in the name of health

By: Stefanie M. Nance

As a legislative intern for Texas State Senator Royce West, my primary duty is to analyze all Senate bills from the Health and Human Services Committee that get passed to the Senate floor for a vote. This analysis includes a summary of the bill’s purpose along with any additional background information. I also list all supporters and opponents to the bill as well as offer my personal recommendation on how the Senator should vote on the bill. I often attend Senate Committee hearings in person and had the opportunity to sit behind Senator West during an Education Committee hearing in order to provide him with information relevant to the topic being discussed. This committee will hear Senate Bill 952, which would require school districts to distribute a wellness plan to each parent of a child who receives substandard results on the Texas state physical assessment.

Personal Responsibility

My practicum experience, specifically my work with Senate Bill 952, relates directly to the Essential Services of Public Health by supporting the individual student through utilizing the school districts in each community to promote health. Communities will need to collaborate with lawmaker’s to successfully decrease the prevalence of childhood obesity. It is with this in mind that I contacted the Texas Association of School Administrators, The Texas Association of School Boards and The Texas Association of Community Schools, an entity who advocates for rural small and middle schools. My plan is to uncover all of the concerns pertaining to S.B. 952 prior to the committee hearing and diplomatically work together to revise S.B. 952 to increase support so that it will become a law. This bill also allows a parent to practice the public health value of personal responsibility by informing the parent that their child is unhealthy and supplying them with a wellness plan to influence change.

Special Events:
• Joint Base San Antonio Day: My visit to Fort Sam Houston, and receiving a hug from Maj. Gen. Jimmie Keenan for my military service.
• The Texas Legislative Black Caucus Gala Event: where I volunteered and saw Gospel artist, Yolanda Adams, sing in person.

Advice for Future Students
• Keep in mind that the goal of your practicum is to learn. Be sure to maximize your experience. Do not be afraid to capitalize on your areas of expertise whenever possible. Be humble. A good leader also knows how to follow. Command respect as it is earned, not given.
**Practicum Highlights**

- Working alongside knowledgeable, professional staff
- Participating in Lobby Day 2015, lobbying for increased post-partum care and continued newborn screenings
- Watching community members work together for a common health goal
- Hearing stories of March of Dimes’ impact on local families

**Advice for Future Students**

- Find a preceptor you respect and admire. A great preceptor makes for a great experience!
- Don’t be afraid to ask lots of questions.
- Seize every opportunity to learn from others in the field. Other professionals have a lot to offer!

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**Public Health Significance**

This practicum exemplifies the Essential Public Health Services:

1. Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems
2. Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues.
3. Mobilize community partnerships and action to identify and solve health problems.

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**Working Together: Programs to Make Every Baby Healthy**

By: Sarah Pruitt

As an intern with the March of Dimes, I worked with the Program Services Director for Texas Public Health Region seven. During my practicum, I had the opportunity to work on a variety of projects as identified by the community-led Program Services Committee.

Go Before You Show (GBYS) is the initiative I worked on, a program aimed at increasing early entry into prenatal care to reduce prematurity and birth defects. I was responsible for interpreting survey data to create a report to be shared with March of Dimes staff and Community Partners. I also conducted a survey for Community Partners, assessing GBYS impact thus far.

Input from the surveys will be used to improve the efficacy of initiative moving forward.

Throughout my practicum I also assisted in the creation of a 2015 Work Plan, conducting surveys, and participating in community meetings to identify local health issues and potential solutions.

My practicum will conclude with organizing and supporting volunteers for March for Babies, one of March of Dimes’ largest fundraising activities. I will have the opportunity to close out this experience working alongside staff, community members, and volunteers.

As a whole, March of Dimes continually funds new research to uncover new insights and solutions surrounding birth defects and premature births.

The projects I worked on brought together community partners to implement education-based programs about prenatal care and its impact on birth outcomes. Partnering with community members is essential to the work of March of Dimes, which centers on research, education and empowerment.
Public Health Significance

My work at Cenpatico over the last semester has covered several of the Public Health Essential Services, especially “Informing, educating, and empowering people about health issues” and “Mobilizing community partnerships and action to identify and solve health problems.”

For the Anti-Bullying Campaign and toolkit, my team and I had to work with existing partnerships between Cenpatico and its parent company Centene to utilize one another’s resources and exchange information needed to finish the project.

In addition, the toolkit’s purpose is to educate and empower adults to take a stand against bullying by knowing how to identify bullying behaviors and advocate for Evidence-Based Programs that reduce bullying. Bullying has lasting physical and mental effects on children well into adulthood, so it is important to intervene and prevent bullying in the community.

Lessons Learned

• It’s okay to fail. In fact, it’s the best learning opportunity you can get!
• Take advantage of time with your supervisor. They have a wealth of wisdom that we can’t always learn in class.

Practicum Highlights

• Raising awareness for mental illness & substance abuse at SXSW
• Creating a mobile phone application for individuals in substance use recovery

A toolkit for adults to put a stop to bullying

By Shannon Trammell

This semester at my practicum with Cenpatico Behavioral Health, I managed a project in which the goal was to create a “toolkit” for adults in the community to increase awareness of bullying and interventions that work to reduce bullying behaviors. Cenpatico launched an anti-bullying campaign last year, and the toolkit will reinforce the campaign’s message of knowing what bullying is and intervening in the most appropriate way.

My job as project manager was to create the project scope and timeline, support my team of marketing and creative specialists, and lead biweekly team meetings to discuss our progress and challenges. In addition, I researched information and drafted the toolkit. We will have it reviewed by external stakeholders and will create an evaluation for readers to help make the toolkit better.

Bullying is a serious public health concern in communities, and I am proud to have contributed to Cenpatico’s efforts to reduce it.
Strategic Planning in State Government

Improving Communication and Management Efforts at HHSC

By: Sarah Viskovich

I interned with two divisions in the Office of Social Services at the Texas Health and Human Services Commission. In the Change Management Division, I helped create a new onboarding process that highlighted HHSC’s achievements, future direction and clarified the overall state government structure for new hires. I also analyzing survey results from offices involved in Business Process Redesign, a workflow improvement process aimed at eliminating redundancy for eligibility workers. In the Community Access and Services Division, I served as a strategic planning assistant and helped evaluate the best options for SNAP-Ed bonus funding, revamped the Regional Community Relations staff policies & procedures, did literature reviews on best practices to improve mental health in domestic violence victims and refugees, and took part in redesigning the outreach protocol for MCO’s to clients coming up for renewal of their health benefits.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience related most to the Essential Public Health Services of “assuring” a competent workforce, “linking” people to health services, “developing” health policies and plans and “informing, educating and empowering” people about health issues.

The function of OSS is to link Texans to needed services, and the largest of these are Medicaid health benefits. OSS also contracts with thousands of community partners to give Texans access to social health services like the family violence and refugee programs, 2-1-1 help line, and SNAP food assistance. Ensuring new hires understand all HHSC program policies and procedures is necessary for programs to run smoothly and tax dollars to be spent wisely so the health of Texas’ most needy people continues improving. It was a privilege to help develop new policies that will help HHSC employees do their jobs better and hopefully better the health of the state.

Highlights During My Practicum:

• Having roundtable meetings with the Associate Commissioners of each OSS Division.
• Seeing my work actually be presented and implemented by HHSC leadership.

Advice for Future Students:

• Don’t be afraid to speak up in meetings just because you are an intern! Your ideas are valuable and your new perspective will be appreciated by your colleagues.

**Practicum Highlights**

- Attended a three-day technical training for all staff of the Texas BDES branch, with lectures from physicians and medical embryologists
- Conducted a hospital visit for case ascertainment for the Texas Birth Defects Registry
- Contributed to The Texas Birth Defects Registry, an annual publication of the BDES branch

**Advice for Future Practicum Students**

Take full advantage of this opportunity to gain real world experience in a specific public health topic (hopefully one that you are very interested in!) as well as the vast knowledge and experience of everyone you will work with. Ask questions and try to offer your assistance wherever possible – this is helpful to them and allows you learn and build your skillsets!

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**Trends in Prevalence of Gastroschisis in Texas, 1999-2011**

**By: Loc-Uyen Vo**

Gastroschisis is a birth defect that usually occurs early on in pregnancy whereby the baby’s intestines (and sometimes other abdominal contents) poke out of the baby’s stomach. Gastroschisis has some very unique risk factors, including young maternal age. Interestingly, the prevalence is significantly lower in blacks compared to whites and significantly lower in babies born to overweight and obese mothers compared to mothers with a normal body max index (BMI). The prevalence of gastroschisis has been increasing worldwide and we are not quite sure why. Using data from the Texas Birth Defects Registry, my study (which became my thesis) was able to confirm this significant increase over time in Texas between 1999-2011.

**Public Health Significance**

As an active surveillance program of major birth defects across Texas, the BDES branch conducts many essential public health services including: monitor the health status of a population, inform and educate people about issues related to birth defects, and research new insights to health problems. The services they provide are of great public health significance due to the traumatic, debilitating, costly, and sometimes fatal nature of many birth defects. My practicum experience incorporated many of the essential services. For example, my research project provided new on the increasing trends of gastroschisis prevalence. I also contributed to multiple reports utilizing the registry data to provide information and communicate the status of many birth defects in Texas.
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

The IRB is an independent administrative body that facilitates human subject research and ensures that the rights and welfare of human subjects are protected during their study participation. Image Source: USA.gov

Learn Human Research Protocols and Regulations, Assist Investigators, and Protect Research Participants

By Eriko Iwatate

During my practicum, I reviewed and approved over 100 studies including Administrative Modifications and work with Chairperson in evaluating Continuing Reviews (CRs) using eIRB (on-line protocol submission system). I checked all parts of the modification application during the review, i.e. parent study smart form, consent form, HIPAA form, waiver of HIPAA authorization, protocol, etc. to ensure that changes reported in the modification are properly reflected in these documents. After the documents were reviewed, some modifications were presented to IRB Chairperson for final approval. To facilitate the review process, I assisted research coordinators and investigators in the navigation of eIRB and preparation of renewal process. I assisted a senior IRB coordinator with preparation of a study closure. I attended research lectures, “Ethics Ground Rounds”. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to observe the Full board meeting as well as the weekly study sessions for the “Certified IRB Professional (CIP)” program, taught by the IRB manager and senior coordinators. In a didactic environment, I learned the core elements of IRB: research ethics, FDA regulation, DHHS regulation and federal policy.

Public Health Significance

The IRB is formed by committee members with qualifications to objectively evaluate new and ongoing research studies on the basis of scientific, legal, and ethical merit. The IRB determines whether the risks involved in a study are reasonable with respect to the potential benefits. IRBs also monitor the ongoing progress of the study—from when it begins to when it ends.

The IRB also protects patient rights, privacy, and safety is protected throughout the study period.

Most human research studies are subject to IRB review and its approval. IRB has, and will continue to have, significant impact on public health, as research is central to the “10 Essential Public Health Services” model by CDC.

My Duties During Practicum

- Review research protocols and other supporting materials to ensure that the rights, privacy, safety, and welfare of human research participants
- Help investigators in the preparation of protocols and study participants with any questions regarding the studies
- Assist IRB coordinators with study modifications, renewals, closure

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- Focus on issues that are directly related to the protection of research subjects
- Use the 3 ethical principles (Respect, Beneficence, Justice) described in the Belmont Report to analyze and explain concerns about research procedures
- Encourage and facilitate discussion with the investigators on the protocol during the review process and promote collaboration between the study team and the IRB
Coaching Healthy Behaviors

Promoting Health By Training the Trainers

By: Lauren Ruzicka

The Cooper Institute, a branch of the Cooper Aerobics Center in Dallas, Texas, is a renowned health organization. The Institute itself conducts ongoing research, implements health programs, and runs health education courses.

In my time at the Cooper Institute, I was tasked with the development of a course, Coaching Healthy Behaviors, specifically for personal trainers. Health coaching has grown in popularity as a singular specialty, as well as in its potential to be an additional skill for health professionals. Coaching skills can equip healthcare workers to facilitate positive behavior change in clients and/or patients.

I worked to structure and develop a one-day offering of coaching education specifically for personal trainers. The course focuses on behavior change theory, with emphasis on the Trans-Theoretical model. Coaching Healthy Behaviors involves six lectures, case studies, skill-building exercises, prompted role playing, and a final exam.

Public Health Significance

The Cooper Institute exemplifies the Public Health Essential Service to “Assure a competent public and personal health care workforce.” The continuing education and certification courses that the Cooper Institute offers are provided with the intention of shaping and molding a well-educated population of health care workers.

My main project in developing a coaching course for personal trainers allowed me to contribute to a competent workforce in a specific skill. Upon completion of this course, trainers are able to have a better background knowledge of the behavior change process. As they train clients, they can be better equipped to have a holistic view of how change happens, and therefore facilitate successful goal achievement.

Additionally, the Institute received a request to instruct a course for a physicians’ group in Colorado, with specific information about the demographic of patients there. I created case studies and client/health care worker scenarios to tie into the course work. In doing this, lessons were relevant to the course attendees, with realistic examples of how tools should be used.

It was gratifying to be a part of providing this essential service, ensuring that health workers are well equipped to care for the public.

Practicum Highlights

- Assisting with course instruction through role playing case studies with students
- Reading comments from blog articles that I wrote for the Cooper Institute’s online weight management community

Advice for Future Practicum Students

Make the most of the time at your practicum. Your experience is often what you make of it. Along with a dedicated work ethic and quality knowledge base, bring a positive attitude and friendly outlook to your practicum. The relationships that are built with others at your practicum site may be stepping stones to future opportunities.
Health Disability and Chronic Disease

A UTSPH and Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) Consortium

By: William Shropshire

Additionally we collectively are preparing a manuscript describing the last 25 years of health disability research and surveillance and what the implications of these events are moving forward in this field.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience included many facets of the 10 essential public health services. The purpose of this project is to describe health disparities that exist for the disabled population. Furthermore, we plan to use results collected from our primary data to inform the public as well as the professional spheres about what actions are necessary to reduce these health disparities. Initial results suggest that women with disabilities are less likely to receive recommended cancer screenings as compared to women of comparable age without disability. It is crucial that states such as Montana become aware of this health disparity and ensure the public equity in accessibility to these services.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

When working independently with large datasets within a health department, be prepared to constantly troubleshoot while coding with statistical software. Data analysis requires diligence as well as patience.

The UTSPH and Montana DPHHS consortium focuses on how to improve the allocation of resources for chronic disease prevention and health promotion for people with disabilities. Photo courtesy of APHA, https://www.apha.org/apha-communities/member-sections/disability-section

Public Health Significance

The UTSPH and Montana DPHHS consortium focuses on how to improve the allocation of resources for chronic disease prevention and health promotion for people with disabilities. Photo courtesy of APHA, https://www.apha.org/apha-communities/member-sections/disability-section

Public Health Significance

The UTSPH and Montana DPHHS consortium focuses on how to improve the allocation of resources for chronic disease prevention and health promotion for people with disabilities. Photo courtesy of APHA, https://www.apha.org/apha-communities/member-sections/disability-section

Public Health Significance

The UTSPH and Montana DPHHS consortium focuses on how to improve the allocation of resources for chronic disease prevention and health promotion for people with disabilities. Photo courtesy of APHA, https://www.apha.org/apha-communities/member-sections/disability-section

Highlights during your practicum

• Primary analysis suggests women with disabilities have lower cancer screening compliance measures as compared to women without disabilities.
• Have begun to draft an important original article on the history of disability research and surveillance in the past 25 years.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

When working independently with large datasets within a health department, be prepared to constantly troubleshoot while coding with statistical software. Data analysis requires diligence as well as patience.

Montana DPHHS has been a national leader in addressing the public health concerns of people with disability. I believe that the initial results yielded through the UTSPH/MTDPhHS consortium will be invaluable for guiding continual policy efforts at the state and local level to address this health disparity. Additionally, this consortium will be fruitful for the state of Texas in providing primary results that highlight a potentially health and cost-adverse disparity in a population that deserves the same access to health screening and prevention services as everyone else within the public health community.
Physician Workforce Diversity

Why Are There So Few Latino Doctors? Latino Parents Perspectives on Barriers and Potential Solutions

By: David Valadez

My practicum experience focused on investigating barriers against Latino adolescents pursuing medical careers and identifying possible solutions.

We interviewed parents of Latino adolescents to get their perspective using both focus groups and one-on-one interviews.

My duties included creating the study protocol, recruiting all participants, conducting the focus groups and interviews, analyzing their responses, and generating our abstract.

Our final product, an abstract, was accepted at two pediatric conferences. I was able to attend both and present on our findings.

The Latino parents noted a lack of encouragement from both schools and families. They also thought that early exposure would be beneficial.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience aimed to “assure competent public and personal healthcare workforce.”

Our participants noted how important it is to them to see more Latino physicians. They believed that sharing culture and language improved the quality of care they received. Culture competence is very important and our study addressed this.

The Department of General Pediatrics at UT Southwestern is very involved in public health. During my time there, my preceptor was also involved in a 5 year randomized controlled trial focused on improving insurance coverage among minority children.

Other faculty in the department performed their own studies that aimed to improve community health on a population level.

Advice for Future Students

• Being receptive to feedback, both positive and negative, is an important part of the practicum experience. It benefits your development and will make you a better public health professional.

Special events/ duties during your practicum

• Conducting focus groups was a neat experience. It offered a relaxed environment for Latino parents to discuss issues their children face.
• Recruiting participants at local businesses was a unique way to generate interest in our study.

Spring 2015 • David Valadez • UT Southwestern Medical Center • Physician Workforce Diversity
Community Health Status Assessment

Practicum Highlights

- Created a 50-page Metric Databases Manual for CHSA health indicator data resources
- Piloted manual at Fort Polk, LA
- Conducted annual CHSA of Joint Base San Antonio, Fort Sam Houston, TX, and presented data in PowerPoint
- Analyzed CHSA data and made recommendations to Fort Sam Houston APHN Chief
- Streamlined CHSA data collection process to decrease time spent on annual CHSA by APHN staff among all Army posts

Lessons Learned

- Always involve your stakeholders when conducting a Community Health Status Assessment
- If you can’t find the answer to a problem, actively seek out the person who has the solution
- Remember that projects always take longer than anticipated, so always plan for extra time

Improving the Community Health Status Assessment Data Collection Process

By: CPT Jodi Brown, APHN, RN-BC

My practicum was with the United States Army Public Health Command (USAPHC) Region South at Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA) Fort Sam Houston, TX. Army Public Health Nursing (APHN) staff conduct a Community Health Status Assessment (CHSA) annually at each military post to determine the health status of community members and the community as a whole in order to prioritize and develop strategies and interventions to increase the overall health of the military communities.

My practicum project was to streamline and improve the current data-collection process for the CHSA by creating a Metric Databases Manual, which provides step-by-step instructions for data collection and is a consolidated resource guide. The manual was piloted at Fort Polk, LA, with an inexperienced APHN to ensure validity and reliability. I also conducted the Fort Sam Houston CHSA, analyzed the data, and made recommendations to the APHN Chief. The data was presented in a PowerPoint presentation.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience most closely related to the Core Function Assessment of the Essential Services of Public Health:

1. Monitor health status to identify and solve community health problems.
2. Diagnose and investigate health problems and health hazards in the community.

As part of the CHSA process, I gathered data for six health-indicator categories:
- (1) demographics
- (2) social & economic factors
- (3) physical environment
- (4) clinical care
- (5) health behaviors
- (6) health outcomes

To monitor the health status and determine health hazards among the Fort Sam community members.

My practicum is important to public health because it will impact the CHSA process Army-wide, streamlining the data-collection process by each APHN. It also helps bridge the gap between local and federal requirements, since each Army installation CHSA is a local assessment of the community to meet a federal requirement.

My practicum directly impacts my future practice as an APHN, since I will be working at the USPHC Headquarters after graduation. In my new position, I plan to update the CHSA tool and make changes based on my practicum experience.
Healthy Futures of Texas: reducing teen pregnancy

Teen Pregnancy rates in San Antonio

By: Michelle Garcia

Healthy Futures of Texas (HF-TX) is a non-profit organization that works to reduce teen and unplanned pregnancy in San Antonio and Texas. As part of my practicum I was able to assess and give input on ways in which Healthy Futures Alliance, a coalition under the HF-TX organization, could reduce teen birth rates. It was concluded that in San Antonio there was a lack of advocacy and policies regarding ways to decrease these pregnancy rates.

Public Health Significance: Inform, educate, and empower

Healthy Futures of Texas initiatives include using health education and communication sciences to teach both teens and parents about sex related topics. They do this by guiding members of the community to make smart choices on ways to prevent teen and unwanted pregnancy. In addition, Healthy Futures of Texas educate others on developing the appropriate skills needed to reduce risky sexual behaviors and promote healthy living.

Healthy Futures of Texas’s abstinence-plus programs reached 3,850 youths and 647 parents in the last year. They target schools with highest teen pregnancy risk in San Antonio and teach curriculums to teens that are part of organizations like SA Youth Build, TOP at Walzem YMCA, and Haven for Hope. According to SA 2020, teen pregnancy rates in San Antonio have declined by 15% since 2010. A new target has been set and it is hoped that by 2020 there will be a 25% decrease.

Practicum Highlights

- Co-facilitate teaching sex education curriculums in schools and parent sessions.
- Go to the state capitol and advocate for evidenced-based sexual health education in schools and increase funding for women’s preventative healthcare in Texas.

Lessons Learned

[OR] Advice for Future Students

- Work hard and have fun! Choose a practicum that coincides with your public health interests.
Barriers to HPV Immunization

Identifying Barriers to HPV Immunization

By: Sonal Sathe

My practicum was in conjunction with UTHSCSA and the University Health System Family Health Center. I examined data from questionnaires from patients and providers to identify why clientele were either not getting the HPV vaccine or not completing the series of three shots, and was involved in an intervention to remedy this problem. I designed English and Spanish-language pamphlets and powerpoint slides to be featured in the clinic, and met monthly with stakeholders to discuss our progress. Our team found out that CHIP recipients and boys aged 11-13 were least likely to get the HPV vaccine in the first place, and girls were likely to get only one shot of the required three. I helped present our data in poster format at a conference (PASSPORT) sponsored by UTHSCSA, and will do so again at the IIMS/UTHSCSA Community Engagement Conference.

Public Health Significance

HPV is one of the most common sexually transmitted diseases. As many strains of this virus can cause deadly cancers, including cervical and anal cancers, this is a major concern. The HPV vaccination became available for females in 2006 and for males in 2011, and is recommended to be given at age 11 or 12. Studies have shown that the vaccine can reduce HPV infection rates in teens by half, and can prevent almost all precancers of the cervix, anus, etc. Despite this, HPV immunization rates remain below desired levels, especially in the Hispanic community.

Informing, educating, and empowering the community in their language was an important part of this practicum, and part of the goal of UTHSCSA’s Research to Advance Community Health (ReACH). Further study will help the ReACH team evaluate the success of the ongoing intervention that is in place to increase HPV immunization rates at the UHS clinic.
Malignant Cutaneous Melanoma

Practicum Highlights

- Communicated with professionals from different backgrounds and entities to attain common goal of correctly ascertaining the melanoma cases and properly collecting the necessary data.

- Perfected case ascertainment techniques on Metriq (cancer registry software) – finding cases meeting study inclusion criteria and then collecting data on these using study specific data collection forms.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

When participating in a study, always confirm exactly what your responsibilities and duties are upfront and that you are fully trained before you begin. Always check first and foremost with the study coordinator to make sure you are on the same page as they are such as with data collection preferences/requirements and exactly what they need for the study. Always ask questions!

Case Ascertainment & Data Collection for Study on Risk Prediction of Metastatic Disease in Malignant Cutaneous Melanoma

By: Edith Zambrano

I performed the case ascertainment and data collection for a study on adults who have malignant cutaneous melanoma in order to discover ways to predict their risk of metastatic disease (main tumor breaks off and implants elsewhere). Cases came from the different facilities that comprise Methodist Healthcare System (MHS) in San Antonio, Texas.

I used the cancer registry software Metriq in order to find the eligible cases that met the inclusion criteria.

Once I found the cases, I used study specific data collection forms to collect data on particulars including: date of initial diagnosis, date of wide local excision and histopathologic specifics of the melanoma.

Besides the final case list and completed data collection forms, my final product consisted of a thorough review of: my learning experience, incidence and mortality data for the Metropolitan area where the cases came from and current treatments for metastatic melanoma.

Public Health Significance

My participation in this study was the epitome of the public health essential service of doing research for new insights and innovative solutions into health problems. The end goal of this study is to find new ways to predict the risk of metastatic cutaneous melanoma, with predictions leading to earlier diagnoses and/or more aggressive treatments upfront. This is of importance because the 5-year survival rate is very low at 18% for those with metastases and morbidity/mortality for cutaneous melanoma is indeed more directly associated with metastatic disease as opposed to the primary tumor.

MHS is committed to the betterment of public health via the collection of quality data to better serve research on improving diagnostic and treatment strategies for cancer patients.

Spring 2015  Edith Zambrano  Methodist Healthcare System  Malignant Cutaneous Melanoma
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.

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
Exploring environmental and public health challenges along the Texas-Mexico Border

By: Calen Kucera

The South Texas Environmental Education and Research course is run by faculty from UTHSCSA and it focuses on public health issues along on the Texas-Mexico Border. My experience was particularly concerned with environmental health along the border.

For four weeks I lived in south Texas and was exposed to the culture and a wide variety of environmental and public health concerns. Educational topics included folk medicine, air pollution, pesticides, heavy metal exposure, unique infectious diseases, water and sanitation, and history of the colonias.

Practiced skills included taking an environmental history, water sampling, and engaging with community leaders.

Public Health Significance

The STEER program does a remarkable job of exposing students to a wide variety of public health services and paths to improving public health. The big focus of the program is to inform, educate and empower students and communities about health issues.

We met with government officials responsible for monitoring health outcomes from infectious disease (CDC-TB surveillance) to water and food safety (EPA, FDA).

We met with city officials who draft policies with affect public health.

We participated in community meetings held by local nonprofits that address issues ranging from housing to water and food access.

Another big strength of the program is the research that is fostered there. Having an affiliation with a large academic institution provides many opportunities for research that improves the lives of local people.

Highlights

- Explore colonias – listen to personal stories of families living in colonias
- Meet local leaders who are trying to improve the health and lives of residents
- Learn about binational water and health programs
- Visits sites along the border that demonstrate environmental health concerns
- Learn about local customs and traditions, including folk healers.

Advice for future participants

- Come with an open mind and an open heart.
- Volunteer in the community during off hours.

Anzaldua Dam. Part of a Binational Water Project that helps regulate water quality, water supply, and flood management of the Rio Grande

Photo Credit: Dr. Noe Garza DDS, MPH
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/