Public Health Practice

Stories from the Field
The University of Texas School of Public Health
Student Practicum Experiences
Summer 2015 – International
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 seventeenth-edition e-magazine showcases student practicum experiences throughout the Summer 2015 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: 9

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### International Practicum Experiences

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Feminine Hygiene in Rural Andhra, India

By: Hanna Blaney

I completed my practicum with the BIRDS organization in rural South India. The project that I focused on involved Menstrual Hygiene Management, particularly exploring current hygiene practices and understanding the barriers women face in regards to menstrual hygiene.

I helped the BIRDS organization by researching current practices, problems, barriers, and beliefs that women face through personal interviews with over 90 women. From this data set, we will look for key areas to address with future interventions. For example, from an initial look at our data, many women have little knowledge about menstruation at menarche. A possible intervention at this level is to encourage mothers to speak to their daughters about menstruation before menarche.

Overall, it was a great experience!

Public Health Significance

The Bharathi Integrated Rural Development Society (BIRDS) is an Indian NGO that is dedicated to fighting poverty through a variety of programs.

My practicum related to the following Public Health Essential Services:

- Monitor health status to identify and solve community health problems.
- Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues.

With this project, I evaluated the current feminine practices of women in order to develop future interventions. In this area of the world, menstruation is very taboo and many women do not have the knowledge or means to effectively and safely manage it. Through the information gleaned from this project, I believe specific interventions that work to educate and empower the area’s women and girls about menstruation and menstrual hygiene can be developed.

Cultural Sensitivity

When working with cultures very different from our own, it is important to be respectful of the host country’s beliefs and customs.

Interviews

- Visited twelve villages in rural Andhra, India
- Interviewed over 90 women about health practices and beliefs around menstruation
- Educated Community Health Workers about normal menstruation and when to take women to the doctor

An antique bike, still in use in a village in rural Andhra, India. (Personal photograph)
The final product was a rapid health assessment. Highlighted data below:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Average age of surveyed woman</th>
<th>29 years old</th>
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<tr>
<td>Average number of children living with one woman</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of women employed at night</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of those without access to women’s hygiene tools</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of women who bath without a bath</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of women who use a safe toilet</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of women who reported violence at home</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of women without access to income</td>
<td>50%</td>
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**When:** June 7, 2015 - July 20, 2015

**What:** Consultation for Christ Pour Tu Hospital Pharmacy Protocols and Lead Investigator for the Rapid Health Assessment

**Where:** Fonds Parisien, Haiti/Haitian Christian Mission

**How:** Through Circle of Health Intl

**Why:** Need was demonstrated for a working pharmacy protocol and because of Haitian Migrant Crisis

**Special Events + Highlights**

- Principal investigator for Rapid Health Assessment
- Computerized entire pharmacy protocol for Christ Pour Tu’s hospital

**Public Health Significance**

Diagnose and investigate health problems and health hazards in the community.

- Investigated needs and hazards of a population of women at the refugee camp of Fond Baillard, Haiti.

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

- Once the health assessment was completed, COHI sent emails to aid organizations and donors with the results.
- The assessment caught the attention of Direct Relief and MADI Apparel.
- Both organizations agreed to partnerships with Circle of Health Intl and are sending much needed housing, medical and health supplies to the refugee camp.

**Advice for future students who travel abroad for practicum**

- Start early on paperwork because it takes a long time to get approved especially if you're at a regional campus.
- Don’t let unknown places stop you from reaching people and places that demonstrate a real public health need.
Adolescent Health and Tobacco Control in India

Working with the Public Health Foundation of India, Summer 2015. By: BEN BUOTTE

My summer internship covered two of the public health essential services.

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of population-based health services. The Public Health Foundation on India is preparing to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the UNICEF-IKEA Program on Adolescents. This evaluation will be used to scale up intervention components in order to cover more of the population of India. My role in the project helped to draft elements of the impact evaluation proposal. Once approved and completed the impact evaluation will provide important information in contributing to adolescent health in India.

2. The second essential service that related to my practicum was “research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems” with regards to tobacco plain packaging. PHFI is working to better understand the legal landscape with regards to tobacco plain packaging in order to make recommendations for the implementation in the near future. The studies and literature published by PHFI will give lawmakers and other stakeholders the resources to make informed policy decisions to protect the health of the people of India.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

If you have the chance to immerse yourself in a foreign culture take it! Do not be afraid to explore and experience places that may be out of your comfort zone. Working in India provides an educational opportunity that no book or classroom could ever teach!
Creating a Water Management Committee (WMC) Training Manual for Rural Communities in Kenya

By: Amanda Cernovich

I worked with the Austin-based nonprofit Well Aware whose mission is to aid in the development of sustainable water systems in rural Kenya. Water, sanitation, and hygiene access were all addressed during my practicum.

Well Aware couples their technical experts in water engineering with Kenyan field staff to implement a community-inclusive process for water systems development. The aspect I was most involved in was the community training regarding how to best manage a new water resource. I was able to assist in the training for Exrock, a rural village where Well Aware drilled a new borehole for a deep-water well.

By combining the resources used for WMC training and information from Well Aware, I was able to create a training manual to be presented to the communities so they can always have access to this vital information.

Public Health Significance

While Well Aware addresses nearly all of the essential services of public health, for my practicum I specifically focused on informing, educating, and empowering peoples about health issues and evaluating the effectiveness of population-based services.

The training of the WMC is highly comprehensive and includes organizational structure, finances and bookkeeping, operations and maintenance, and water, hygiene, and sanitation as it relates to good health. The committee consists of pivotal stakeholders who share the information amongst their community members.

Another task I completed was to update the community and facility impact surveys used to gauge the accessibility and use of water, sanitation, and hygiene opportunities for households, schools, and clinics. We had volunteers conduct surveys within their communities and hope to utilize this data to determine what effects a new water system has on the health and economic well-being of an area.

Special events:

• While in Nairobi, our team got to help celebrate Mike’s, a Kenyan staff member, daughter’s 10th birthday. She had a small party at their house complete with watching cartoons and eating cake. After singing Happy Birthday, she performed the Kenyan tradition of feeding everyone a bite of cake.

• For a few days, our team stayed at a game lodge and because Mike was once a safari driver, we got to go on a safari drive at a national reserve. We witnessed a pretty intense scene of two lionesses stalking a lone zebra, but they decided not to attack.
Failure to Return for Infant HIV Test Results
“INTEREST study”

Setting up a study to determine factors associated with failure to return for Infants HIV test results in Uganda.

By: ELYANU, PETER JAMES

My Practicum assignment was to start implementing the INTEREST study. The INTEREST study is a mixed methods study to determine factors associated with failure to return for infants HIV test results as well as facilitators and barriers to return. The study is being conducted in three rural hospitals in Uganda. The IRB approvals had been obtained and it was time to start implementation.

My duties were to:
• Develop the manual of procedures.
• Participating in recruiting study staff.
• Conduct protocol training.
• Pilot test the study procedure.
• Set up the study sites.

I worked under an experience researcher from Makerere University Johns Hopkins Collaborations program who guided my learning and experience.

Public Health Significance
My Practicum was research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems.

The INTEREST study’s objectives are to determine factors associated with failure to return for infants HIV test results in Uganda and determine barriers and facilitators to return for results. About one in every 5 infants who test HIV positive do not start lifesaving antiretroviral treatment (ART) because the caregivers do not return to pick the infants HIV test results. Without ART half of these children die by age of 2 years.

This study will determine factors associated with failure to return for infants HIV test results and determine barriers and facilitators for return for results. The findings will inform development of policies and guidelines to improve early infant HIV diagnosis, linkage to antiretroviral treatment. Antiretroviral therapy reduces mortality among HIV infected infants and improves their quality of life.

Highlights during my practicum
• Pilot testing the study procedures and forms I developed and see them work with minimal revisions was gratifying.
• Participating in staff recruitment was very interesting. I prepared the interview guide (both oral and practical). We asked interviewee’s to read consent forms in the local language (Luganda) to test their reading skills.
• Recruiting the 1st three study participants on day one was very exciting to the team.

Advice for Future Practicum Students
Practicum in an opportunity to practice in the field what you learnt in class. Choose one that meets your learning objectives and be open to learn from diverse group of people in the field.
Mortality Data Analysis: Cali, Colombia

Practicum Highlights

- Was immersed in the culture of Cali, Colombia through home stays for 2 months while learning about their public health system
- Saw many different parts of the city by attending filed-work public health classes with the medical students
- Toured a private hospital in the city
- Toured a number of public health clinics throughout the city
- Met amazing faculty and students at Javeriana

Lessons Learned

- Involve the community as much as possible in every step of public health practice for success
- Culture plays a very important role in health
- Approach public health work humbly and open to new findings
- Actively listen to and respect community members
- Be confident and curb timidity; valuable moments come and go quickly

A public health immersion analyzing mortality data in Cali, Colombia

By: Kaila A. Fagerstrom

As a practicum MPH student at La Pontificia Universidad de Javeriana in Cali, Colombia, I was exposed to a variety of the faculty’s projects. The main project on which I worked was an analysis of Cali’s mortality data from 2000-2012. I organized this data by 13 selected death indicators (ie: HIV, TB, homicide, etc), calculated crude and adjusted mortality rates by year and by the 22 communities within the city of 2.1 million people. Discovered that 2 communities in particular had disproportionate rates compared to the other communities.

Another project in which I was involved with was visiting low SES neighborhoods throughout Cali with the medical public health students from Javeriana. We performed community needs-assessment surveys and data presentations. We worked alongside local stakeholders to obtain community input and present information back to the community to gain further insight. This information will eventually be used for community interventions.

In addition to the data analysis and community surveys, I also reviewed health inequities and disparities literature and translated several articles from Spanish to English for the faculty.

Public Health Significance

The first phase of the 10 Essential Public Health Services is the Assessment phase. In analyzing the mortality data for the city, I provided the first step to successful public health practice. Using biostatistics and epidemiology, I calculated the mortality rates and graphed the findings to delineate high mortality rates and neighborhoods in which these rates are disproportionate. This work diagnoses areas of need and informs stakeholders of high mortality and low mortality areas helpful in assessing disparities.

Using this information, the faculty now plans to proceed with the next phases to public health practice. They will mobilize community partners in high mortality areas, assess policies and programs in those areas according to mortality rates, and start creating and evaluating interventions to decrease mortality rates and eliminate disparities between communities.

Photo I took overlooking Cali, Colombia from nearby mountain Las Tres Cruces.
For years, HIV treatment has been virtually free; however donor support has drastically decreased of recent, because technically Nigeria is the giant of Africa. But under the rug, the success of the economy is not materialized in the lives of Nigeria’s citizen because of corruption and embezzlement of funds at the top.

**Winning With IICWIN!**

Some HIV treatment centers have begun to ask that patients pay a portion of the treatment cost, which is practically impossible for many. Consequentially, many have stopped treatment and IICWIN’s work has become more difficult. This summer, IICWIN has begun conducting interviews with directors of HIV treatment centers and focus group discussions and surveys for those with HIV receiving treatment at those centers to get the facts on the new cost-sharing for treatment, and discover possible solutions.

IICWIN is still gathering information from different treatment centers across Oyo state, but there are high hopes that when conclusions have been reached, their presentation to Nigerian government will result in a positive change that will make HIV treatment more affordable and available for Nigerians living with the virus. IICWIN stands to WIN the battle against HIV in Nigeria!
Establishing healthcare in a underserved, needy area

By: Nathanael Phillips

Many areas in the mountains in Guatemala have no elements of healthcare or public health. Many are too poor and too uneducated to know what to do regarding their health. Few social programs exist for those in these areas.

Adonai International Ministries has a number of clinics established in the mountains surrounding Canilla, and are currently in the process of building a hospital. A typical week includes hiking up to clinics or running the onsite clinics 5 times per week, with a focus on maternal and child health.

These clinics are a short term fix to the need for sustainable and definitive healthcare for this population – available in this future 60 bed hospital with 4 operating theatres.

Volunteers aid with clinics and conduct needs assessments for future use.

Public Health Significance

Many aspects of the Essential Services of Public Health are addressed at Adonai International. This will vary in the future as phases of their plans change, but currently they are focused on linking people to needed personal health services and assuring the provision of care in an area that it is otherwise unavailable.

We drove as far as we could, then hiked for hours (at times) to reach a small, isolated community. We would conduct clinics that met peoples individual current needs, as well as provide vitamins, medications, and education. We would also leave them with more information about how to reach us and where we were located should problems arise.

When problems would present that were beyond the scope of the staff present, there would be a coordination of efforts to ensure people got the care they needed at low-no cost.

Information was gathered throughout for future planning and strategizing.

Special events/ duties during your practicum

- Medical personnel learn to conduct prenatal ultrasounds and help with weekly clinics, including education and information recording.
- Freedom is given to volunteers to plug-in to wherever they can be useful-the clinics, the nursing school, or the construction/planning effort.

Lessons Learned/ Advice for Future Students

- Come prepared to be self-directed on the day-to-day tasks, but be flexible as plans change and unforeseen events arise.
Global Health Outreach & Trachoma

Satellite clinics & fighting preventable blindness

By: Chloé Woodington

With the combined efforts of Common River, a non-profit orphanage located in Aleta Wondo Ethiopia, and the 11-member UTHSCSA Global Health Outreach team, medical care was provided to over 500 Ethiopians in a 2-week span. Working with local translators and community members, a relationship was established for future medical and educational endeavors. I had the privilege of interviewing, diagnosing, and creating a plan of action for my very own patients; all under the supervision of Emergency Medicine physicians of UTHSCSA. I also implemented an educational course to the women’s group and children of the orphanage on the “Causes of Trachoma.” This leading cause of preventable blindness plagues the region. We conducted pre and post-education surveys to further grasp what was known about the disease and how to prevent it. The results are still under review, but initial data appears promising.

Special events
• Identifying multiple cases of Filarisis, better known to cause Elephantiasis.
• Visiting the ALERT clinic, which treats Leprosy patients and other rare dermatological cases. We learned first hand from the Ethiopian physicians. They do so much with so little.

Public Health Significance

This experience was a very expansive public health initiative and covered nearly all 10 of the Essential Public Health Services.

We focused on the Service of linking people with needed personal health services that were otherwise unavailable. The clinic hours were well utilized and had the ability to treat a variety of illnesses. It was brought to our attention that for many Ethiopians, their only means of available and accessible healthcare is provided each summer by the UTHSCSA Summer Outreach team. The need was strong and we filled the void during our time there.

Due to the extensive partnership with local translators and community members we completed another Essential Public Health Service. The medical exposure that they gained from our time together as well as medical supplies that were donated, will better equip them with the knowledge and power to help their community.

We also had the ability to inform, educate, and empower people about health hazards in their community via our weekly educational programs concerning Trachoma. Filling this Essential Service is imperative to our goal in preventing the progression of blindness due to a preventable Trachoma infection.

Lessons Learned
• Experience everything with humility. Though the medical contribution seems small and finite, you will learn so much more about yourself as a participant and provider in public healthcare.
• Don’t let fear hinder your improvement. You are doing yourself a disservice if you don’t take the risks to get better.

Team Ethiopia Outreach Summer 2015. Courtesy of Ann Ding (Team Ethiopia Outreach member).
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/