Public Health Community Externship

Robert Keys III, MPH, Laurel Desnick, MD, Danielle Bienz, MEd, David Evans, MD

Abstract

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Abstract

Introduction: For the past 14 years, the University of Washington’s Rural/Underserved Opportunities Program (RUOP) has offered rising second-year students a public health community externship (PHCE). The PHCE introduces students to public health skills and concepts that are most relevant to their careers as future physicians such as interpreting community demographics and epidemiological data, facilitating community partnerships, and translating evidence-based literature into a localized intervention strategy. The PHCE compels students to pay attention to patients’ lives outside of the exam room and empowers them to engage in upstream health issues. Methods: This practicum is in combination with a 4-week summer clinical rotation that takes place in rural or urban underserved communities across five northwestern states. Students devote an average of 10 hours a week to their practicum. The balance of their time is spent in clinic. Each student is assigned a faculty mentor who oversees his or her practicum. Faculty research mentors review assignments and offer guidance throughout the rotation. Results: From 2009 to 2014, 646 students enrolled in this elective experience. Of these students, 99.3% successfully completed the curriculum. On average, students scored the question “Did you develop a positive attitude toward rural/underserved community medicine?” a 5.6 on a 6-point Likert-type scale. In 2014, the demographic analysis and the annotated literature review were the highest rated assignments among students, with a 4.75 mean score. Students regularly reported positive feedback from community partners, local and/or regional media coverage of their work, and local funding to support their projects. Discussion: The PHCE outlined in this publication provides students with a public health skill set that is most relevant to 21st century medicine. Medical students gain experience in assessing communities, building partnerships, and translating evidence-based literature strategies into local community health programs.

Keywords

Medical Education, Translational Research, Public Health, Practicum, Community Development, Community Medicine, Evidence-Based Public Health, Community Health Assessment

Educational Objectives

By the end of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Identify one or more health issues of their assigned community by analyzing and integrating publicly accessible demographic information, epidemiological evidence, and results of community conversations (Week 1).
2. Discuss with their faculty mentor two or more differences between treating individual patients and addressing a community health issue (Week 2).
3. Establish a relationship with a community partner as a means to address a public health issue (Week 3).
4. Analyze at least five peer-reviewed articles and describe how each article could potentially translate into a locally appropriate public health project to be evaluated by local partners and faculty mentors (Week 3).
5. Synthesize their community assessment and evidence-based literature into a public health project design that is evaluated by faculty mentors and community partners.
Author Information
Robert Keys III, MPH: University of Washington School of Medicine
Laurel Desnick, MD: University of Washington School of Medicine
Danielle Bienz, MEd: University of Washington School of Medicine
David Evans, MD: University of Washington School of Medicine

Disclosures
None to report.

Funding/Support
None to report.

References
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