



Emergency Preparedness & Response Internship

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Introduction

Over the summer of 2019, I had the opportunity to intern at the Public Health Emergency Preparedness & Response Program in the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

Site Information:

Name of Site: Dennis Avenue Health Center

Address: 2000 Dennis Ave., Silver Spring, MD 20902

My supervisor: Sean O'Donnell

The site mission: The building is a Montgomery County government building for the Department of Health and Human Services.

The goals of the site: Plan for emergencies in order to mitigate their potential impacts, educate communities, respond to public health incidents, and assist in the safe recovery from emergencies.



The Montgomery County symbol



This is my intern badge that I used over the summer

Activities:

- I participated in a points of dispensing (POD) exercise that practiced giving out medications to all of Montgomery County residents in an event of bioterrorism.
- I listened to epidemiological interviews to figure out where a foodborne illness outbreak began.
- I learned how the National Syndromic Surveillance Program (NSSP) works to track potential outbreaks.
- I took training courses from Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) - An Introduction to the National Incident Management System and Introduction to the Incident Command System.



The office building the Emergency Preparedness & Response Program is in as well as other public health offices. Image from Montgomery County, MD Government <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Maps/2000DennisAve-M2.html>

Discussion:

It was interesting for me to see how the subjects I am learning in my major, Public Health Science are applied in the workplace. It is different to learn about public health in class and to see public health workers and epidemiologists in the field. In public health classes I have learned about theories of how to intervene in public health issues through the primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention levels. For example, through collective action, harm reduction, or reducing environmental barriers. In the office, I saw prevention in action by tracking diseases and surveillance through a national database in order to foresee and prevent possible outbreaks, such as the flu or measles. I learned how an epidemiological interview helps epidemiologists figure out what an outbreak is and where it could be spreading next by calling infected individuals to ask what they had eaten, their symptoms, who they had been in contact with, as well as what preventative measures to take.

Impact:

This internship has helped me discover the many possible career paths to take with a Public Health degree. During emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Emergency Preparedness & Response Program office is still on the field working and helping mitigate and deal with the virus. I would like to thank all the health care workers and others who are working through the pandemic to help in every way they can.

Issues Confronting Site:

The program's goal is to plan for emergencies by creating action plans through tested methods. They work on and review their plans in weekly meetings. I was able to attend these meetings over the summer and learn about the difficulties of creating plans for emergencies such as a bioterrorism attack. Planning is challenging because the office has to work with many different offices in order to create a comprehensive plan.

Acknowledgments:

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