

1. Exemplifying the Practice-based Research Focus Area

MPH intern assists with research to understand birth control access among women at risk of having babies addicted to opiates/pain medicine



Tennessee has a severe problem of babies born addicted to opiates/pain medicine (called Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome or NAS).

Through a joint research endeavor funded by the Tennessee Department of Health, Knox County Health Department epidemiologist and principal investigator, Mark Prather, has partnered with UT Department of Public Health faculty and co-investigators, Drs. Laurie Meschke and Kathleen Brown, to identify facilitators and barriers to birth control among women enrolled in physician-supervised treatment at methadone clinics.



MPH intern Jessica Matlock, DVM and Mark Prather, PhD, Epidemiologist, Knox County Health Department

Through the Academic Health Department (AHD) partnership, UT MPH intern, Jessica Matlock, DVM, has assisted with enrolling and interviewing women into the study. "Participating in this study allowed me to be a small part of a future solution to the problem of NAS babies born in Tennessee. While I interviewed women for the study, several of them opened up to me even further and told me their own stories about having given birth to NAS babies before the mothers were in treatment. It really touched

my heart and made me want to work to help this population."

Methadone is a synthetic replacement to pain pills. Public health is focused on prevention, which in this case, means figuring out how to reduce NAS by preventing unplanned pregnancies among women addicted to opiates/pain pills. **Once we better understand the facilitators and barriers to birth control for this priority population, we may be able to prevent babies born addicted to opiates more efficiently.**