MPH Memos

WINTER BREAK!

We made it! The end of an online, challenging, busy, and unique fall semester is finally here. For some students, you made it through your first semester in graduate school. For others, you studied hard and completed the comps exam. For staff and faculty, you provided students with a meaningful learning experience even while dealing with the struggles of ZOOM. This is a huge accomplishment and you should all be proud at the work that has been done. It is now winter break and we find ourselves with over a month to relax, enjoy the holidays, and prepare for spring semester. This is the final memo of 2020, but I welcome any comments that you have to improve the newsletter for the new year. Please don’t hesitate to contact me at pprother@vols.utk.edu and take this short survey to provide feedback about the newsletter.

PUBLIC HEALTH RESOURCES

- **Reading List:** Spillover by David Quammen, Half the Sky by Nicholas D. Kristof, And the Band Played On by Randy Shilts, Infections and Inequalities by Paul Farmer, Dreamland by Sam Quinones, & Pandemic by Sonia Shah.
- Check out the [Healthy People 2030 Objectives](#)
- **Watch List:** 13th (Netflix), The Human Element (Prime), Period. End of Sentence (Netflix), Unbelievable (Netflix), Disclosure (Netflix), & Totally Under Control (Hulu).
- Check out the [top five PSA videos](#) from undergraduate students in PUBH 201!
- Upcoming [APHA Webinars](#)

IMPORTANT DATES

- The university closes for the holiday on **Wednesday, December 21st**
- Spring semester begins on **Wednesday, January 20th**
PUBLIC HEALTH GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION

Looking for a way to get involved, plan meaningful events for public health students, and gain leadership experience?

The Public Health Graduate Student Association has four openings for board positions in 2021! Consider applying or nominating a fellow student for a position.

Descriptions for each position can be found in the PHGSA bylaws.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: CHES

Planning for a career in Health Education? Consider becoming a Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES)

1. What is CHES?

CHES is a certification intended for individuals planning to work in the health education field (i.e. community outreach coordinator, health educator, program manager, etc.) that demonstrates health education knowledge and skills based on the Responsibilities and Competencies for Health Education Specialists.

2. Why is this important?

Many employers require or prefer a CHES certification!

3. Eligibility and requirements?

To earn a CHES, you must pass a multiple-choice exam based on the responsibilities and competencies above. Eligibility is determined by academic qualifications (degree or course hours in health education) which are listed here. The certification must be renewed annually with a fee ($60) and every five years with at least 75 continuing education hours. This might include attendance at professional meetings, professional presentations, leadership in a health education organization, academic courses, webinars, & more!

For more information, check out the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing Website.
EPIDEMIOLOGY CONCENTRATION

Fall 2020 has brought a new concentration to the Department of Public Health, Epidemiology!

Meet Dr. Ehrlich, PhD, MPH

Dr. Ehrlich is a reproductive and perinatal epidemiologist whose research focuses on pregnancy exposures, behaviors and outcomes related to obesity and diabetes in women and their children. She has been at UTK since 2015. She initially wanted to be a chemist or doctor, but sparked an interest in women’s health after taking a class during her undergraduate studies and after the government required that research had to include studies of women. She can be contacted at sehrlich1@utk.edu

Tell us about the epidemiology concentration!

There was overwhelming interest from students in the epidemiology minor and in pursuing internships in the field. This was part of the reason epidemiology was added as a concentration. COVID-19 has also helped people to understand what epidemiology is. As a student in the epidemiology concentration, you can expect to feel prepared to apply for jobs as an analyst. You will learn SAS and programming skills. This concentration provides students with a lifetime of fun and professional skills. The hope is that after going through the program, students can read through data soundly as this field has been politicized. Even for students not in the concentration, epidemiology skills (or adding the minor) are still going to benefit you. There’s always going to be an analyst on your team and you’re going to be expected to report information in metrics. These skills show employers that you can communicate well.

Consider adding a minor!

The Intercollegiate Graduate Statistics and Data Science Program requires 9 credits: 2 level A courses & 1 level B. PUBH 530 Biostatistics satisfies a requirement for a level A course. More information can be found through the Haslam College of Business.

The Epidemiology minor requires 12 credits:
- **PUBH 530**: Biostatistics
- **PUBH 540**: Principles of Epidemiology
- **PUBH 640**: Advanced Epidemiology
- An approved elective

For more information about the minor, visit the Graduate Minors webpage.
We spoke with two students in the Epidemiology concentration to learn about their experience in the program so far and what they plan to do after graduation.

Abby Carpenter

Hello everyone! My name is Abby Carpenter and I am a first year MPH student with an epidemiology concentration. I am a Knoxville native and I obtained my BS in Biology Health Science. I am the GTA for Intro to Epidemiology, and I work at the Knox County Health Department. In my spare time, I love to travel, try new restaurants, read, and hike. I am also a music and workout enthusiast!

I chose the Epi concentration because I am passionate about medicine and research. Indecisive in nature, my interests are in the fields of psychology, virology/bacteriology, and the pharmaceutical industry. Whether it is in mental health, in communicable illnesses, or in clinical trials, my goal is to be an Epidemiologist. Short term goals include publishing and mastering the art of statistics. My long term goal is to one day be the next Dr. K or Dr. E where I can make an impactful difference in human health.

Laura Sisk

My name is Laura and I am a first year MPH student in the epidemiology concentration! I grew up in Memphis, TN and graduated from UTK in 2019 with a Bachelor of Arts in Neuroscience. I’m a plant-based cooking enthusiast, casual runner, and lover of textile crafts (knitting and embroidery are my favorite!) Hiking is my favorite way to spend the weekend around Knoxville and thankfully, it’s a relatively safe activity during the pandemic.

I spent the last year working in a women’s clinic that met the needs of underserved patients in my hometown. There, my interest in someday being a physician grew, and so did my budding interest in public health. I chose the epidemiology concentration because I enjoy problem solving, and wanted to acquire and grow the skills necessary to investigate determinants of health, specifically women’s health. After the MPH program, I hope to go on to medical school. I envision my future career as a physician-public health professional as a symbiotic relationship: one where my involvement in public health improves, and is improved by my caring for patients.
COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect us all from our personal lives to our graduate studies as we adapt to virtual learning. As public health students, we have a responsibility to be role models in how to stay safe, healthy, and protect others!

Reminders:

- Anytime you are going to campus, complete the Daily Health Self-Screening in the Tennessee App.
- The Student Health Center is offering COVID-19 testing! You can call to make an appointment at 865-974-5050.
- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds, wear a mask, and stay six feet away from others!
- For more information about COVID-19, please visit the UTK COVID Homepage.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: NICK KONCAR

Please introduce yourself!

My name is Nick Koncar. My concentration in the MPH program was in Health Policy & Management. I worked as a registered nurse on a medical/surgical unit at UT Medical Center before and during graduate school. I moved to Roanoke, VA and started working as an infection preventionist at Roanoke Memorial Hospital in August. This position has been a great fit as it has allowed me to incorporate my previous nursing experience with my recently attained MPH degree.

What was your APE in the program?

I interned at the Knox County Health Department in Spring of 2020. During Fall of 2019, I had a 30-hour quality improvement project that focused on the organization, management, and tracking of active grants for the health department. I was fortunate that our contact for the project, the Executive Director of Organizational Planning and Development, had another upcoming quality improvement project that would allow me to assist in the introduction of a new performance management system that would help the health department meet its accreditation requirements. Once the pandemic took priority, I was tasked with a few duties related to the COVID-19 response. This often involved researching the most up to date federal and state guidance and sharing it with Knox County Residents.

What has it been like working as an infection preventionist?

It has been really fulfilling so far. I like that the position is multi-faceted; an infection preventionist has duties related to quality improvement, process improvement, accreditation, safety, and epidemiology. For most academic, Level 1 trauma centers, an infection preventionist can anticipate rounding on their assigned units for about 15-20 hours a week. There are two different types of rounds we do; one is a device round as there is an emphasis on the patient being a susceptible host for microorganisms related to the presence of a medical device. The other type of round is “environment of care” which focuses on The Joint Commission’s standards for infection control — this helps each department identify gaps and ensure compliance with accreditation standards. Many times, the projects you work on stem from issues identified during rounds on your assigned units. A large academic hospital would be a great setting for a new MPH graduate to find employment as an infection preventionist. I have found that there is significant value placed on the research and epidemiological principles that accompany the attainment of an MPH degree; this provides a recent graduate with the opportunity to make a significant impact. Two organizations that I wish I had knowledge of and would have helped me better understand this role before starting are the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA) and Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC).
ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT, CONTINUED

What has it been like working during COVID-19?

Working during the COVID-19 pandemic has really underlined the importance of staff safety and evidence-based practice. It’s unfortunate that the pandemic has stressed the United States healthcare system in ways I would have never thought imaginable, but I do think it has made the need for public health to have more substantial input apparent.

What is your advice to MPH students during this time of COVID?

I’d encourage MPH students to look for areas in which they can grow during this time. This pertains to both personal and professional growth. As aspects of the pandemic have changed everyday life, trying to parallel your virtual presentations in the academic setting to the prospective of a virtual interview can be extremely useful in communicating effectively throughout a virtual interview process. If students are interested in epidemiology, I would strongly encourage them to pursue opportunities such as contact tracing that may help them build skills and gain experience with a public health entity before pursuing post-graduate employment.

WINTER BREAK IDEAS

Need ideas for COVID-19 safe activities over the break in Knoxville? Look no further!

Get Outdoors

- Ijams Nature Center
- Seven Islands Wildlife Refuge
- UTK Gardens
- High Ground Park
- World’s Fair Park & Volunteer Landing
- Sequoyah Hills Trail

Holiday Lights:

- Light the Park in Farragut
- Zoo Lights at Zoo Knoxville
- City of Knoxville Holiday Neighborhood Trails

Volunteer:

- Check out this list of virtual volunteer opportunities

Stay Connected While Virtual

- Check out apps like Houseparty or Jackbox games to connect with friends