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Practicum Site: Tennessee Families for Vaccines

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Vaccine Advocacy in Tennessee

Key words: vaccination, legislation, advocacy

Introduction: Declining vaccine rates have been noted throughout the world, including here in the US. This decline in vaccination increases the risk that vaccine preventable diseases could return. We have already seen this here in the US with the measles outbreak focused in Texas. Tennessee Families for Vaccines (TFV) is a group that advocates for public health and immunization policies in Tennessee. For my practicum I worked with TFV on legislative advocacy as well as public outreach and education focused upon immunizations and public health.

Methods: My practicum time was divided into multiple areas. First, I attended weekly planning meetings during the Tennessee state government's legislative session. When proposed public health legislation was discussed, we developed strategies for how to promote or oppose relevant legislation. This culminated in TVF's visit to the Tennessee state capital to discuss public health legislation with state representatives and senators. Second, I worked with TFV during public outreach events such as Dicken's of Christmas festival in Franklin, TN, and at the Nashville Sounds' "Hit a Home Run for Health Night" to promote TVF's mission. I also developed an educational website targeted towards legislators and the general public for TFV that addressed common questions regarding vaccines.

Results: My primary practicum product is the educational website that covered common questions about vaccines that was written for the legislators (primarily in Tennessee) and the general public.

Conclusions: With vaccine rates declining across the US, it has become even more important to advance and maintain public health measures and systems. Continued legislative and community engagement is vital to strengthen public health measures such as vaccination. Community organizations such as TFV can play a key role in advancing these measures.