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Practicum Site: Tennessee Department of Health, Wilson County Health Dept.

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Public Health Practice in County Health Departments



Introduction: My practicum experience was completed with the Tennessee Department of Health through the Wilson and Trousdale County Health Departments. My internship addressed public health practice and included community engagement to data analysis. It specifically focused on two public health issues to: 1.) identify mental health resources for medical professionals, and 2.) help connect new/expecting mothers to resources within the county. To help identify mental health resources for medical professionals, we created a mental health toolkit to identify resources that are spread throughout the county.

Methods: To address the mental health objective, my team and I examined previous work performed in other counties and decided to develop a mental health toolkit. We also used Feedback from mental health professionals within the county was also used in the toolkit's development. To address the new/upcoming mother's objective, we created a Google forms survey that included questions about WIC (Women, Infants, and Children), Baby & Me tobacco free program, and breastfeeding. We also received advice on what questions would work best from coworkers that worked directly with families. We implemented the Survey at the Wilson County Community Baby Shower to help identify what resources have been used, and what resources need more attention within the county.

Results: A 10-page pamphlet was developed for the toolkit that described the following: mental health; why it is important; symptoms of mental health illness; how to find out what (Private and TennCare) insurance covers; resources to call; and how to help the mental health of people around you. The new mother survey collected information from 60 new/expecting mothers within the county and provided insight to how many knew about resources that they could access within the county. Major findings included ~ 30% of the mothers not knowing they could receive a free or reduced priced breast pump through their insurance, and that 33% of the mothers did not know that the state of Tennessee has a breastfeeding hotline.

Conclusions: The mental health toolkit has had positive results through the mental health task force of Wilson County and will possibly be implemented in the upcoming school year in the county. The survey was successful in capturing the needs of mothers within the community and the data collected from it will be used to access where help is needed the most. This experience has helped me grow my public health knowledge and learn what it takes to be well-rounded public health professional.