

Eryn Leahy

Summer 2020

PH 498

Interim Report 1 (Weeks 1-5)

Overview of the agency:

Portage County Health and Human Services has given me an overview of the agency and supplied me with many materials that showcase the heart of the organization. Upon arrival on my first day, I received a copy of the mission, values, and strategic planning goals of Portage County Health and Human Services Division of Public Health. In addition to this handout, I also received their newsletter, their 2019 annual report of Community Health Improvement Process and Plan (CHIPP), a copy of Portage County Community Health Improvement Process and Plan from Healthy People Portage County, the 2018 Portage County Youth Risk Behavior Survey, and the Portage County Coalition for Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Annual Report. These materials truly outline the work that the Portage County Health and Human Services Division of Public Health complete each day. I had a full day to review these materials and ask any questions that I needed to. I feel that through this, I was able to understand the overview of the agency and put it into practice in the following weeks.

Specific activities of involvement:

Since beginning my preceptorship, COVID-19 has been a large portion of the focus of my work. I have attended daily meetings for the Incident Command System and weekly meetings for both Emergency Operations Center and Community meetings with schools, police

officers, hospitals, and other important entities of Portage County. During week two, there was an outbreak of cases in Portage County which resulted in a large number of new cases very rapidly. I have created multiple graphics to illustrate health information to the public via the Portage County Division of Public Health Facebook page, please check it out. In addition to that, I have been tasked with delivering meals to patients in isolation that need to be set up at a hotel. I was also trained in contact tracing, which I know is a beneficial skill to bring with me in the future.

During week three, we were able to host a free drive-up COVID-19 testing event with the Wisconsin National Guard. We started off day-one with 300 tests and had such a great turn out that we had to order 300 more, and we were able to collect 600 tests. I helped during the testing event by completing the intake and verbal consent forms for each person being tested. Because it was such a tremendous turn-out (here is the local [news reporting](#) on the crazy number of tests completed, watch the clip to 1:30 to see my feature debut in my PPE), we were able to have a second day of testing where we collected around 400 tests. These two days were very hard work, but I have never felt prouder to be in Public Health. One National Guard member even questioned me, “how are you being so nice and still getting the work done so fast?” but I knew that I was meant to do something like this, where I could combine my passion for Public Health with my customer service skills! Following the two days of testing, I helped organize and compile the forms completed to help the department get ahold of people in Portage County to relay their test results, and also to analyze the data collected. From the testing, 997 tests were completed and only six positive cases were identified, three of which were in Portage County.

In work outside of COVID-19, I have also been working with different coalitions, helping them to complete projects. Some specific projects I have been working towards have

been Tick Removal Kits, researching United Way services for the Healthy Weight Coalition, creating signage and materials for a condom dispenser open to the community, creating monthly displays for health awareness months, making graphics for the Facebook page to help people with stress relief, helping work on making EBT cards available at local farmer's markets, and creating Facebook posts to educate people on other programs and resources available through the Public Health department. I also have been able to help the Wisconsin Well Woman Program (WWWP) coordinator with multiple projects, such as creating graphs to display data and helping format a newsletter detailing work done by WWWP. I have been busy so far in these weeks, and I'm proud of the work I have been able to complete for the Health Department. I know the materials I've created will be a great addition to my portfolio, and I'm looking forward to being able to shadow other departments within Public Health once they are able to resume regular duties.

Changes that have occurred:

As previously stated, an outbreak of COVID-19 in Portage County has changed my priorities of projects. I have primarily been tasked with delivering food to patients in isolation and updating the case counts daily to the Facebook page. Publications to the community have become my top priority, as I want to make sure people can understand the seriousness of what is going on. It is especially important to me because my whole family and a lot of my friends still live in Portage County, so getting the information out in an easy format has been number one. In addition to that, we have noticed a huge spike in confirmed cases in the 20-30-year age group and with little existing materials targeting that group, we have had to create our own materials, using our own experiences and opinions, to get the word out.

On another level, I want to share the difference I saw in the community during the outbreak. Since I work at a local bar and grill, I am deeply involved with the general public. As the number of cases began to rise, I saw a shift of people taking it seriously. The first weekend after the outbreak was reported, I saw a major increase in people wearing masks, practicing social distancing, and experienced many of my coworkers realizing this was close to home. Since most coworkers know I am interning for the Health Department, they all began to ask me for advice on how to prevent themselves from contracting COVID-19, including my managers and the owner of the restaurant. I truly got to experience the NCHEC Responsibility Area IV: Serve as a Health Education/Promotion Resource Person. Through this experience, I was able to educate my coworkers and bosses and to help them protect one another through the pandemic.

Positive impacts:

So far this experience has shown me the good and bad of working at a health department. With the outbreak of COVID-19, I was able to feel the stress and pressure the entire office experiences. The fast and large increase overwhelmed the system immensely and was only further stressing by dealing with those infected not cooperating. But through this experience, I saw everyone come together to work as a team and help as many people in the community as possible. I also got to experience the heart of Public Health, using your resources. While delivering meals to patients in isolation, we had to work with community resources, such as the Aging and Disabled Resource Center, to find them food and hygiene products. This experience really helped me to become passionate, as we were able to work directly with those affected by COVID-19, even if it was a smile shared through masks.

Problems or issues:

As previously stated, the outbreak of COVID-19 did allow me to witness and even experience some of the stresses that come with working in Public Health. I witnessed people in the community scrutinizing the department for not putting their own Safer at Home orders in place, not realizing that every other department that did received a lawsuit against them. I also watched people in the community either blaming the health department for telling them to wear masks or blaming them for the people who didn't wear masks. At some points during the outbreak, it felt like nothing could be done right in the public's eyes. But through it all, I am glad to be having this experience through such a crazy time in Public Health because I am learning so much! Other than having some major realizations about the relationship between some community members and the health department/government in general, I have no specific problems.

Conclusion:

All in all, I am learning a lot from this opportunity. A lot about Public Health, what I want to do in the future, and a lot about myself as well! I am enjoying my time and making the most of every project I get to be involved with. I know this experience is different for me than it has been for others in the past. I know that I'm able to do less during my time with everything being different because of the pandemic (parks being closed, events being canceled, meetings are only online), but I think this is showing me a real look into how crazy it can be in the Public Health world. But mostly showing me how immensely important Public Health is in each and every community.