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JrCOSTEP/SUPEH Intern, Summer 2009

My internship was through the U.S. Public Health Service as a JrCOSTEP at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the Environmental Health Services Branch. I got interested in the JrCOSTEP program after a representative from the Indian Health Service came to Colorado State University (CSU) to talk about the program last fall. When I got a phone call from CAPT Michael Herring at CDC offering me the position, I jumped at the chance. I found out that the two CDC JrCOSTEPs would be included in the Environmental Health Services Branch's (EHSB) Summer Undergraduate Program in Environmental Health (SUPEH), giving us access to extra opportunities like field trips and guest speakers. This made me even more excited for my internship. After a few weeks at home after graduation, I packed most of my things in my car and drove to Georgia for the summer.



When I arrived at CDC, I was welcomed very warmly by everyone in EHSB. They also organized orientation activities for all of the other programs in the National Center for Environmental Health, so I had the chance to interact with interns from across the country. By the end of the week, CAPT Herring had found a long-term, in-office project for me. I worked with CAPT Mark Miller researching and creating educational materials on norovirus in shelters to help prevent disease outbreak in temporary shelters set up for victims of natural disasters.

CAPT Herring and CAPT Craig Shepherd also organized a lot of opportunities to get experience in the field. Over the course of the summer, we observed and assisted environmental health



professionals at the local level at Gwinnett County, DeKalb County, and the Georgia State Department of Health. We also accompanied CAPT Theresa McDarmont on public health visits to national parks in the area. We also got the chance to shadow Dr. John Floyd from the USDA on processing plant inspections; it's amazing how many chickens are processed in a day and how quickly inspectors have to decide if each bird can safely be a food product. I developed a new respect for the industry! We also had the opportunity to go to the National Environmental Health Association Annual Educational Conference and listen to speakers and attend seminars there. In addition, all of the SUPEH interns joined another group of interns to go on field trips to the Carter Center, Coke Headquarters, Georgia Aquarium, and more.

The best activity was our trip down to the Vessel Sanitation Program in Florida, where we got to inspect two cruise ships with the team from CDC. I had never even seen a cruise ship before, much less been on one, so this was entirely new to me. On the first day, I went with another JrCOSTEP on the technical inspection, where we looked at all of the swimming pools and the distribution system for both recreational water and potable water. Ships of this size go through about 975,000 gallons of water each day, so the storage, treatment, and distribution systems are incredibly complicated. The next day, I shadowed CAPT Brian Cagle on an inspection of all of the buffet lines and specialty restaurants. With 4,000 passengers and over 1,500 staff per cruise, the ships really are “small cities!” I am still amazed at how much environmental health work gets done in such a short time span by these inspectors.

Overall, this has been an absolutely fantastic experience. Being across the country in Georgia has been tough, but I enjoyed living in a different area and getting the Atlanta experience, from burgers at the Vortex to visiting Stone Mountain, Zoo Atlanta, and the Georgia Aquarium. The people I have worked with at CDC are truly some of their best in their field, and are 100% committed to public health. My internship has provided me with the opportunity to network with some of the “best of the business” and learn how public health functions at the federal level. I couldn’t have asked for better mentors than CAPTs Shepherd, Herring, and Miller. It also let me get an idea of opportunities within the Public Health Service, which is a totally different world from civilian work.