

New Experiences with the New Orleans Health Department

Mon, 12/05/2022 - 00:00

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This semester marked my transition in the reproductive health world from the non-profit sector to the governmental sector, as I followed my internship supervisor Meshawn Siddiq to the New Orleans Health Department (NOHD). I went into this internship period with a mixture of excitement and nerves, and I'm happy to report that although there was a lot to learn, my interest and knowledge in the field of public health, specifically in the field of maternal and child health, has increased tremendously.

One of the projects that I started this semester was compiling progress reports for various programs including those that involve government support for birthing individuals and their families in New Orleans. These programs include Health Care for the Homeless (HCH), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and Healthy Start New Orleans (HSNO). We just received approval for a grant to fund another program Family Connects, which I will begin receiving progress reports for soon. Outside of HCH, which provides primary and dental care to individuals regardless of their ability to pay, the progress reports I read mainly concerning updates and challenges in programs addressing maternal and child health issues in the community. I compiled a spreadsheet describing the number of individuals served each month, the type of individual served, the goal number the program should have met, and how far off each program was from meeting that goal. I then was able to talk with Meshawn and the other interns at NOHD and describe my findings. In general, we found that each of the programs had aimed to serve more people than it actually did, and we brainstormed why programs were unable to meet their goals in serving the population. We discussed better social media promotion to issues stemming from understaffed clinics, and I was able to draw upon my previous experiences studying reproductive health in the New Orleans community to contribute to this conversation.

As this semester comes to a close, I feel that I have a better understanding of how government operates in the public health sector and a new appreciation for the work they do. I know that sometimes it's easy to become disillusioned with the government, especially after the Dobbs decision and other restrictions on reproductive health care. However, if anything, this semester has taught me the importance of government-sponsored community public health programs, especially those that meet the needs of those who would otherwise be unable to have access to important healthcare services and education. I want to thank my internship supervisor Meshawn for allowing me to have this amazing opportunity, as well as Dr. Daniel and the Newcomb Institute's Reproductive Rights and Reproductive Health Internship program for supporting me throughout this process. I'm excited to continue with NOHD next semester and look forward to new learning experiences and challenges as I continue with this internship.