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Jr. COSTEP Summer 2013
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My name is Patricia Wrona and I am a senior at Illinois State University studying Environmental Health. In order to graduate from ISU, students need to conduct a 12 week internship. I first heard of the Jr. COSTEP program from retired USPHS CAPT George Byrns, my junior year when he spoke of students going to Alaska to work with the Indian Health Service for their internships. I knew this was an internship I would like to gain experience from, so I spoke with my professor about picking the right location for me. I was interested in working in institutions so the Phoenix Indian Medical Center was the perfect choice for me.

I could not wait for my internship to begin; given this was my dream job. My preceptor was Leonard Lopez who is the chief of environmental health and safety at PIMC. I also received guidance from CAPT Greg Heck (ret) who is a safety and occupational health specialist. I was able to work closely with CAPT Heck on my internship project which regarded safe patient handling and movement. CAPT Heck was in the process of improving the hospital's SPHM program through purchasing the proper equipment for lifting patients to reduce injuries to patients and staff.

Upon arrival to PIMC, the code red drills needed to be conducted in the business occupancy buildings. It was my responsibility to notify the building supervisors, security, maintenance, and switchboard of the code red drill



to make sure the drill was conducted as smoothly as possible. I assessed the staff's response during the drill and observed proper procedures. After the drill had concluded, I would meet the employees at their designated meeting location during a code red where I conducted a Q and A regarding the fire policy. I was in charge of writing the after action report of my observations and recommendations for each building on the PIMC campus. I would share my reports with the supervisors and notify them if the employees need further training or not.

During my internship at PIMC I was able to partake in various activities including conducting ergonomic

assessments, table-top exercises, hazard rounds, fire safety, and industrial hygiene sampling. I had some background knowledge on ergonomic assessments from school but seeing one in person was interesting and I loved the hands on experience I received. The hazard rounds were important to conduct to make sure each department was abiding by the policies and to protect workers and patients from any possible dangers. I was looking forward to the industrial hygiene sampling of departments which is fascinating in my opinion, because it measures the exposure levels the workers are being exposed to during their work day. Instruments I got to use to monitor the exposure levels were dosimeter badges, formaldehyde detector tubes, and an infrared analyzer to test for nitrous oxide levels.

Although my internship was institutional based, I was given the opportunity to accompany the district office to conduct field work under the supervision of CDR Vincent Garcia and LTJG



Mistin Ray to multiple reservations to conduct casino, food, and school surveys along with a rabies clinic. This allowed me to apply my knowledge of safety towards the inspections in relation to electrical and fire safety. The facilities I inspected were the Havasu Landing Restaurant and Casino on the Havasu reservation. I also was able to inspect the Head Start Center on the Chemehuevi reservation. I got to travel to San Carlos and Whiteriver to help the reservations with their Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (RMSF) campaign. It was a remarkable experience to educate the community and protect the dogs against the brown dog tick by collaring dogs with tick collars and spraying pesticide around the homes on the reservations.



The overall experience and knowledge I gained from this internship is immeasurable. I met some brilliant professionals who shared their work experience and taught me so much. Traveling 1,800 miles to another state was out of my comfort zone. Never in a million years did I think I would leave my hometown to do this kind of internship especially in a different state. I have grown as a person as well as in the field of environmental health. I am very grateful I got to work with the Indian Health Service and fortunate to have gotten acquainted with the culture of Native Americans. The three months of my internship flew by so fast but allowed me to realize I would like to continue my career with the USPHS. I would recommend the Jr. COSTEP program to any students looking to further their education while gaining an unforgettable life experience.