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**JRCOSTEP Summer 2016**  
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When I left Arizona a year ago to begin a Master of Public Health program at the University of Washington, I didn't imagine I would choose to return only for the two most scorching months of the year. But the JRCOSTEP confirmed my choice to return and offered a singular opportunity to experience full-time environmental health work in my home state, and the chance for a glimpse into the professional world of U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps Officers. I loaded up the car and drove home, ready to start my internship at the Phoenix Indian Medical Center in downtown Phoenix.

Phoenix Indian Medical Center (PIMC) is a central hub of medical services for tribal members in Phoenix and surrounding areas. It provides a range of medical services - from inpatient services to dental, pediatrics and podiatry - along with a WIC clinic, National Institutes of Health research areas, and a well-stocked library. My preceptor was Leonard Lopez, Chief, Environmental Health and Safety, PIMC, and I had a second supervisor in LCDR Jason Lewis, Safety Officer, PIMC. From the lower level of the building, the Environmental Health and Safety staff worked constantly to ensure that the patients, staff and visitors would be secure - whether they were in the middle of a routine visit or an emergency situation.

As a result, there was never a dull moment at PIMC. I always had something to do, and often enjoyed the freedom to plan how I wanted to do it. Checking the Safety Data Sheets binders, testing the overhead radio systems and switching out dosimeters kept me moving from department to department and busy tracking my progress and trying to smooth the path for the next person to take over each task. I was able to routinely participate in environmental tours conducted within PIMC, and had the rare opportunity to observe both the inspection and the post-inspection verbal report from a Joint Commission Intracycle Monitoring site visit.

If I ever did find myself with an empty morning ahead of me, that meant it was time to walk into one of PIMC's many bustling departments and surprise some poor staff member with a fire drill. Compelling a busy health professional, who is in the middle of a shift and has patients waiting nearby, to pull a signal that sets off an ear-splitting fire alarm - in response to a fire that we all know does not exist - is not a task for the faint of heart. After watching LCDR Lewis manage this task with grace and humor several times in a row, I finally got up the nerve to manage the drills myself, and was grateful for the willing participation and enthusiasm of the staff each time.

I also had individual projects to work on, including my primary COSTEP project of developing materials for the Departmental Safety Coordinator. The diverse set of services offered at PIMC



Trying on a PAPR during an OSHA training at PIMC

introduces a wide-ranging set of health and safety concerns. Mr. Lopez and LCDR Lewis were developing a plan for each PIMC department to choose a Safety Coordinator, who would act as a liaison for the Environmental Health and Safety staff and ensure that their department's safety measures and training were up-to-date. My contribution was to summarize this plan into a draft of a formal Appendix to the 2016 Safety Management Plan for PIMC, and to develop an introductory checklist for each Safety Coordinator to use as a template for their own Safety Plan and training material for new employees.



Mosquito trapping near Parker, AZ

I was also given numerous opportunities to engage in environmental health outside of PIMC. This included teaching sections of an OSHA training managed by CAPT Dave Cramer, attending the 2016 Arizona Infectious Diseases Training and Tabletop Exercise, and traveling across Arizona from Payson to Parker to Supai Village in the Havasupai Canyon. The latter was generously arranged by CDR Vince Garcia. With his assistance, I was able to accompany Environmental Health Officers at the Western Arizona District Office and Colorado River Service Unit and participate in environmental inspections of casinos, pools and hotels under tribal jurisdiction in surrounding towns, prompting me to consider environmental health concerns from bedbugs to noise exposure to pool water pathogens. With the Colorado River Service Unit's staff, I caught and classified mosquitoes for West Nile virus surveillance, a task that swung from fascinating to monotonous and back again as we trapped, sorted, and then actually tested the mosquitoes.

Finally, I was able to travel to Supai Village in the Havasupai Canyon with Zachary Hargis and George Chung, both IHS Environmental Health Officers. In Supai, I assisted in teaching a section of a training for the Supai elementary school teaching staff, and participated in food and hotel inspections. The inspections and trainings there brought home the challenges of environmental health in an area that is simultaneously remote and routinely filled with tourists. Trash management in an isolated canyon, keeping cartons of dairy cold as they arrive by helicopter, and attempting to inspect a food stand that keeps variable hours and is located roughly forty minutes by foot from our lodgings were logistical challenges that I had not previously considered.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunities afforded by the JRCOSTEP. The exposure to environmental health practices, guided by Mr. Lopez and the many people who answered my many questions and gave me a chance to see what they do every day, broadened my conception of environmental health and the challenges that define the everyday practice. The officers I encountered - LCDR Lewis, most of all - were models of professionalism and made the Public Health Service Commissioned Corps an even more appealing career prospect. And the program itself, including the constant assistance of CAPT Kenny Hicks, was exceptional in the support that was offered to me before, during and after. I would like to thank everyone involved, because I know that what I have learned will be invaluable in my future career - whether I find myself working alongside Environmental Health and Safety, or as a health professional relying on their support.