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Western Carolina University
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My name is Luke Whaley and I am a rising senior in the environmental health program at Western Carolina University. I served my externship with the U.S. Public Health Service at the Phoenix Indian Medical Center, Phoenix AZ from May 30th until August 4th. My preceptor was Mr. Leonard Lopez, Manager, Environmental Health and Safety, Phoenix Indian Medical Center. I was able to work closely with a diverse staff from many different tribes. This facility serves a major role in the Indian Health Service due to its location and patients from so many different tribes. During my externship, my role as Junior Safety Officer consisted of daily activities within the hospital in addition of additional unexpected duties when the Environmental Health and Safety Officer and the Emergency Preparedness Coordinator position became vacant the same week I reported to duty.



I got my taste of emergency preparedness when I conducted *code red drills* (i.e. fire drills) for all of the business occupancy buildings. The main hospital building and all of the departments within it are considered healthcare occupancies. The buildings not connected to the hospital are considered business occupancies and include the dental clinic, primary care, Specialty Clinic, and warehouse. I was also responsible to setup a procedure and plan for *code silver drills* (i.e. active shooter). I did my research on many other hospital active shooter drills and how they conducted them. I helped set up planning meetings with the supervisors, and chief executive personnel.

For employee health in the hospital, I took care of *WebCident* reports which are online reports filed by supervisors and employees once there has been a worker incident, patient fall, visitor incident, or a social dispute. My job was to follow up on these reports and speak to the employees regarding their health status as a result of the incident, if they took time off, if they were receiving follow-up treatment, and if there is anything the Environmental Health and Safety Department could do to help them or prevent the incident from occurring again. I also conducted respirator fit tests of new employees. I was only tasked to fit test employees who will be working in infectious environments with patient contact. This testing keeps them safe from any transmission of disease.

I participated in a noise study within the warehouse and the central supply room with CAPT David Cramer, LCDR John Hansen, and Mr. Lopez. The warehouse was tested due to an employee complaint being filed about the noise in the office space. The office space was located underneath HVAC systems that caused disturbance to staff. The department was tested by hooking up a



dosimeter to an employee and testing the levels after a complete eight-hour shift. The results (58 decibels) tested well below the OSHA standards for an industrial workplace (<85 decibels). However, the ANSI Standards state the office must be <45 decibels. I was able to document findings and give the engineering supervisor recommendations on how we can create a safer, more comfortable work environment. Our recommendation to the supervisor was to apply continued efforts to minimize the noise exposure by wearing hearing protection (ear plugs, ear muffs, etc.) while the machines within the department are running.

A huge experience for me was the Joint Commission Survey I was able to participate in. As we went along the surveyor taught me the OSHA Standards he was looking for in the rooms and their procedures for life safety in the hospital. My most memorable moment in the survey was when we held a meeting with all of the supervisors of the departments that are related to employee life safety in the hospital. When he brought all of the supervisors in the same room it brought to my attention the importance of camaraderie between the different departments to help the hospital run smoothly and efficiently.

I absolutely loved my experience, working with such wonderful people along with being able to learn more and more each day. I was able to network with Commissioned Corps officers who I feel will help lead and guide me to joining the U.S. Public Health Service. This externship gave me a firsthand knowledge of environmental health from an occupational health standpoint, allowing me to use the information I have been taught at my university's environmental health program. I strongly recommend this externship to those of you who are striving to make a difference. Those of you who are willing to go above and beyond.