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JRCOSTEP Summer 2019
Emory University
Oklahoma City Area Office
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

I am a Master of Public Health candidate in Environmental Health at Emory University in Atlanta, GA. My undergraduate background is in public health and emergency management, and I was always interested in the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) as an opportunity to combine both disciplines. After hearing lectures from several Commissioned Corps officers in my classes at Emory, I decided to apply to the JRCOSTEP.



Preparing to monitor water anesthetic gasses in the at Claremore Indian Hospital's operating room



Conducting a ventilation assessment at Wewoka Indian Health Center

I was assigned to the Indian Health Service (IHS), Oklahoma City Area Office. That Area Office helps to provide healthcare services to Native American populations at two hospitals and eight clinics in Oklahoma and Kansas. I worked with the Division of Environmental Health Services which provides consultation to the facilities, identifying risks and providing recommendations to help program managers and tribal officials make informed decisions.

My preceptor was CDR David Bales who works on injury prevention and institutional environmental health projects. These areas were new to me, but I was able to work in the field almost every day conducting radiation protection surveys, ventilation surveys, nitrous oxide monitoring, and infection control surveys to ensure safety and help facilities achieve accreditation. Being

located at the Area Office was a great experience because it allowed me to travel around Oklahoma to work with many different Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) and safety officers with various working styles and areas of expertise. I spent time at the surrounding field offices working with EHOs on general environmental health and safety surveys in food establishments, water parks, swimming pools, casinos, powwows, and more.

In addition to becoming more familiar with the work of IHS, I got advice and guidance from Commissioned Corps officers about careers with the USPHS. I had the opportunity to participate in a Remote Area Medical event along with officers from across the country where volunteers provided free medical, dental, and vision care to over 1,500 people. We checked and installed car seats to prevent injuries in motor vehicle crashes. At this event, along with several other car seat checkup events, we installed 58 new car seats.

I also created facility profiles that included the safety and emergency response resources and radiology equipment at each IHS clinic and hospital in the Area. The profiles will be used to respond to requests for information and help prepare facilities for accreditation surveys.

My favorite part of the summer was working within the IHS hospitals. On rounds with the safety officer at Lawton Indian Hospital, I saw how hospitals prepare for and respond to emergencies while participating in a child abduction drill, a fire drill, and emergency after action reports. During institutional environmental health surveys, I learned how environmental health intersects with the clinical work of healthcare facilities. At Claremore Indian Hospital, we monitored nitrous oxide and waste anesthetic gasses during dental and surgical procedures. It was exciting to see what goes on in the operating room while helping to keep patients and providers safe from harmful exposures.

The JRCOSTEP was an excellent experience to move out of the classroom and into the field as well as travel to a new part of the country. The EHOs I worked with emphasized the importance of not only surveying areas for health risks but also communicating effectively and educating communities on what the risks are and how to prevent them. I was able to see how the concepts from my coursework applied to real-life situations through hands-on experience conducting institutional health surveys and general environmental health surveys. Prior to the JRCOSTEP, I knew very little about IHS, but now I would absolutely look for a career as an EHO after graduation.



Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge