

Injury

Assignment Description:

The Texas Department of State Health Services offers an opportunity to practice injury epidemiology in a dynamic and diverse environment – geographically, professionally, and culturally.

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) is an agency that employs approximately 13,000 people, the majority of whom live and work in Austin, Texas, the state capital. In addition to operating the largest public health laboratory in the country, DSHS is responsible for a myriad of public health-related programs and activities ranging from regulatory services, to prevention and preparedness, to mental health and substance abuse. Injury and violence prevention are included in this mix and have been named a number one priority by agency executives. As such, there is an exciting opportunity for a CSTE Fellow who is interested in injury and violence prevention to delve into the subject matter, run with it, and really make a contribution to how this large state addresses this important public health issue. Because of the size of DSHS there are always career placement opportunities and the visibility of this Fellow will be elevated because injury and violence prevention are a DSHS priority.

Fellow's Anticipated Day-to-Day Activities:

The Fellow would be expected to participate in activities as a regular staff member. The Fellow's day to day activities will be determined by the individual's interests in combination with the needs of the Injury Epidemiology Group. The fellow will work collaboratively with epidemiologists and researchers within and outside of DSHS, have opportunities each week to attend staff meetings, mentoring sessions, probably an educational event, a community meeting, a strategy sessions on whatever issue may have arisen, work on the Fellow's designated project, responding to data requests received from the public, etc.

Potential Projects:

With limited resources and a small staff, the DSHS Environmental & Injury Epidemiology and Toxicology Branch (EIET) has concentrated on a small variety of injury related areas: motor vehicle collisions, traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries, drowning, suicide and child fatality review. The purpose for the CDC/CSTE Fellow will be to lead a project in a new or underdeveloped area of injury epidemiology.

Projects would provide opportunities for establishing a surveillance system, collaboration with state and community partners, strategic planning, program and policy implementation, evaluation and research, and securing funding.

Injury Falls

More than 1,000 Texans died and more than 20,000 others were hospitalized from fall-related injuries in 2004, about two-thirds of these among people at least 75 years of age. With demographics suggesting an increasing proportion of elderly, epidemiology has an important role to play in the future health and safety of the Texas population.

This is a complete start-up project and is suited for individuals who enjoy initiating and creating programs. EIET has no previous activities in this area so the Fellow would be expected to identify needs and resources, establish collaborations, and lead efforts to determine and implement a plan of action.

Suicide Surveillance

While more than 2,000 people die from suicide annually in Texas, it is more difficult to find a reliable estimate of the number of non-fatal suicide attempts. Without a state population based system, available information provides only a fragmented estimate.

DSHS is currently involved in a project exploring the utility of hospital discharge data in providing a reliable and valid estimate of adolescent suicide attempts. This work needs to be expanded to other datasets and populations.

The Fellow would be expected to apply epidemiologic principles to help establish a suicide surveillance system in Texas. Taking a leading role, the Fellow will work with already identified agency resources and community collaborators in developing and implementing a clear plan of action.

Child Maltreatment

With increasing interest in the role of adverse childhood experiences in the development of chronic diseases and risk behaviors later in life, and thus on child maltreatment as a public health issue, there is a need to complete an assessment of the extent of this problem in Texas. The uniform definitions for public health surveillance of child maltreatment that were recently issued by CDC could be used as a basis for establishing a child maltreatment surveillance system in the state.

The Fellow would take a lead role in establishing an interagency work group to address this issue. He or she would work with a variety of sections within DSHS as well as with professional contacts at other agencies involved in this issue. This would be an excellent opportunity to conduct some ground-breaking work.

Role Emergency Preparedness:

There is active involvement of injury epidemiologists in emergency preparedness. For example, during Hurricane Ike, which made landfall in Texas in September 2008, injury epidemiologists focused on the state's tracking of injury deaths associated with the hurricane. To implement this innovative project, staff worked, in cooperation with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and medical examiners, justices of the peace, forensic centers, public health officials, and hospitals to quickly, accurately, and collaboratively conduct mortality surveillance related to the hurricane. The surveillance effort served as an early warning alert system to detect mortality patterns where public health action could be initiated at the local, regional, or state levels.

Assignment Location: Austin, Texas

Primary Mentor:

John Hellsten, PhD

Epidemiologist

Secondary Mentor:

Linda Jones, MSPH

Manager, Injury and EMS/Trauma Registry Group