

**School:** Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC) School of Medicine at El Paso

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**Collaborating organizations:** El Paso City and County Health District, University of Texas Houston School of Public Health at El Paso

**Project description:**

The TTUHSC School of Medicine at El Paso provides the clinical education for approximately half of TTUHSC medical students after spending the first two years at the Lubbock campus. The location of the El Paso campus (close to the US-Mexico Border and in a large, predominantly Mexican-American community) presents a challenging set of public health issues that impact the education of medical students. These issues include new and emerging infections, chronic diseases related to ethnicity, and perhaps most importantly, access to health care. TTUHSC has been long concerned with these issues and has embarked on a program of preparing resident physicians and junior faculty members for integrating public health information and research into their practices. At the same time, the incorporation of public health concepts into the medical school curriculum has been limited. Students receive limited instruction in public health during the first two years of the curriculum for all medical students in Lubbock. Those who go to El Paso for their clinical experience during their third and fourth year and who participate in the community health rotation receive considerable exposure to public health.

The Regional Medicine-Public Health Education Center at Texas Tech had the following objectives:

1. To integrate public health principles into the curriculum.
2. To develop curricular materials using public health-related case studies centered on target populations of the U.S.-Mexico Border, especially the *barrios* and the *colonias*.
3. To provide an integrated educational program in which clinical experiences in public health build on principles learned during the second year of study.

This project resulted in expanded public health education in the second and fourth year curricula. Basic public health principles (including biostatistics, epidemiology, and case definition) were incorporated into a second-year course in evidence-based medicine, using web-based learning and evaluation modules as well as lectures, classroom discussions, and community experiences.

The fourth year program emphasizes five topics that are of importance in the US-Mexico border population. These include: environmental health and the risks associated with toxicants in the home as well as risk communication skills; prescription drugs, alternative medicine, and the issues associated with international access to medications; the metabolic syndrome in an

at-risk population; immunizations and international health; and work-related injuries and other health issues in the migrant farm worker population. Writing teams that included medical school faculty, public health officials, and public health school faculty developed case studies that address these issues. The cases are set in *colonias*: poor, predominantly Mexican-American rural communities and usually without water or sewers--the same environment for that the fourth year medical students will experience as part of their required rotation in Community Medicine. Student workbooks, guides for facilitators, pre- and post-tests, and reference guides have been developed to support the case studies.

The long-term goal of this project is to develop educational objectives, teaching methods, and instruments that can be used as a major component of the medical education program of the proposed new four-year medical school in El Paso. The educational objectives for the proposed new school include items that focus on public health and disease prevention:

1. To demonstrate the elements of social structure and to use this information in understanding and managing human behavior and illness.
2. To understand the basic elements of the national health care system, its funding, and the effects of these factors on individual and community health.

It is the intention of Texas Tech to establish a strong foundation of public health and community outreach within the curriculum of that new medical school.

**Publications:**

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