



**ENS Susan Montenegro
University of Maryland**

As a rising third year student at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy, I couldn't have asked for a better experience than my time as a JRCOSTEP at Indian Health Service Headquarters in Rockville, MD. I spent two months working with CAPT James Bresette, Deputy Director for the Office of Clinical & Preventive Services, and my primary assignment for the summer was to help develop the foundation for a textbook on pharmacists and their roles and contributions to public health. This entailed doing research, literature reviews, managing author contact information and discussing how the need for public health pharmacists should be an issue at the forefront of our profession. As a PharmD/MPH dual degree student, this was the perfect opportunity to see how I might apply the skills I acquire through both programs. In addition, the research found was utilized to write a paper for a summer course on reimbursing pharmacists in Maryland through a Medicaid Waiver.

Working in headquarters also enabled me to meet and work with other officers who taught me the "ins and outs" of IHS and shared their experiences in the field. This gave me a new perspective on the pharmacy profession and how clinical pharmacists in IHS can utilize the training received in pharmacy school to the fullest extent. In addition to CAPT Bresette, CAPT Chris Watson, Principal Pharmacy Consultant, and CDR Scott Giberson, National HIV/AIDS Principal Consultant, were among these individuals. I worked with CDR Giberson to develop a survey tool to call state Boards of Pharmacy to

ask about collaborative practice agreements in their state. I also accessed and reviewed state laws and regulations to compare legislation to the responses given. We also worked with other students to develop a strategic pathway that outlines how pharmacists might one day receive recognition as primary care providers and gain reimbursement for cognitive services. The outcomes from these two projects were then shared with RADM Robert Pittman for input and feedback. I was also able to assist CAPT Watson and CDR Giberson when the GAO conducted an inquiry on IHS pharmacy counseling practices and a “behind-the-counter” drug class. I then attended the meeting with GAO analysts to discuss the IHS-provided results of the inquiry and contributed information on how pharmacy students are evaluated on clinical skills.

Finally, being in the DC area was an ideal location as I was able to take a summer course while having my COSTEP experience. In addition, I was incredibly fortunate to make several “field trips” to other agencies in the area. The first was a visit to the FDA to meet with LT Susan Pellock. There I learned more about the Office of Generic Drugs as LT Pellock went over an Abbreviated New Drug Application and showed us samples of generic devices that the office receives prior to market approval. Next was a trip made to the Ronald Reagan Building, where CAPT Watson introduced me to Mike Hope, Pharmaceutical Advisor to USAID. Mike is a former IHS pharmacist and explained what he does now at USAID involving the Supply Chain Management System. This tied in nicely with a third trip made to see Dr. Kathy Marconi, Director of Strategic Information in the Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator for the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Dr. Marconi explained her work at the office and then also set up meetings with other individuals in PEPFAR. I learned how PEPFAR works downstream from USAID in Supply Chain Management and also learned from other MPH graduates about their international experiences working abroad. Lastly, being in the DC area allowed me to take part in COSTEP activities such as a tour of the capital, a social with other COSTEPS from the FDA and USP, and lunch with RADM Pittman, RADM(ret) Church, and other officers and COSTEPs working in IHS Headquarters.

My time at IHS Headquarters has been nothing short of amazing. I have never had such a well-rounded, diverse and challenging experience, and it has truly changed my perspective of the profession and raised my expectations for myself. This experience has only strengthened my positive view of the Public Health Service as a place to build a fulfilling and rewarding career.