



2008 CYHRNet Student Interns in Child and Youth Health Research FINAL REPORT

Erin Ptolemy – Messages for Young Women about Tobacco and Breast Cancer

Description

Erin worked on the research project 'Messages for young women about tobacco and breast cancer' with a team of researchers in BC, New Brunswick and Ontario to determine best practices for messages related to breast cancer and smoking.

University/Institution

Faculty of Health and Social Development, University of British Columbia Okanagan

Supervisor

Dr. Joan Bottorff, Professor and Dean, Faculty of Health and Social Development

Report

My summer as a BC Child and Youth Health Research Network student intern was an incredibly valuable experience prior to commencing my master's program at UBC Okanagan. The funding allowed me to continue working with Dr. Joan Bottorff at UBCO on a program examining effective messaging strategies for young women regarding tobacco exposure as a risk factor for premenopausal breast cancer.

The study is comprised of a multi-disciplinary research team based out of Kelowna, Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa, and Fredericton. The study's co-investigators have an abundance of experience in the fields of tobacco control, health promotion, nursing, epidemiology, and sociology. I found this multi-disciplinary approach valuable as it has allowed me to view research from multiple perspectives, as well as network with leaders in the field. I recruited participants for focus groups, did data collection, transcribed and coded qualitative data, as well as built and thematically coded an inventory of messages directed at young women. I also assisted in the writing of an article entitled 'Increasing Awareness of Smoking and Breast Cancer for Young Women' for the summer issue of Canadian Breast Cancer Network News.

My major project over the course of the internship was developing an online survey. With Dr. Bottorff as my mentor, I assisted in the development of an online survey examining young women's reactions to information about tobacco exposure as a risk factor for premenopausal breast cancer, and their interest in information about how to reduce their risk. This involved ethical amendments, an online survey tool, and dissemination of the survey's URL online as well as in the media. The survey is currently online, and young women aged 15-24 can take the survey at www.breastcancerandsmoking.ca.

As part of the conditions of this CYHRNet student internship, I gave a presentation to department faculty and staff on the rationale and the logistics for preparing this online survey. The presentation was well-attended, and we had an interesting discussion about ethical considerations, development of survey questions, use of the online survey tool, methodologies and potential analysis. This discussion gave me inspiration for my thesis proposal, and also led to developing a major proposal to the BC Cancer Foundation to continue exploration and analysis on the topic.

It was a privilege to be exposed to such innovative and original research, as well as have a renowned and experienced researcher as a mentor. My experience as a CYHRNet student intern has allowed me to build my skill set as a researcher, as well as lay the groundwork for my master's thesis and future career.