

IntraHealth - UNC Fellowship Program 2017 Fellowship Opportunities in Tajikistan

IntraHealth International is offering a three-month fellowship opportunity for current public health masters and doctoral students enrolled in the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health. The program is administered by IntraHealth in cooperation with the Gillings Global Gateway®.

IntraHealth International empowers health workers to realize positive health outcomes for individuals, families, and communities around the world. We ensure health workers are present where they are needed most, ready with skills and systems to deliver high-quality care, connected to information networks that support high performance, and safe to deliver services in environments that promote dignity and equality. A non-profit organization headquartered in Chapel Hill, NC, IntraHealth partners with governments, the private sector, and civil society to foster sustainable local solutions to health workforce and health care challenges. Over the past 37 years, we have assisted 100 countries in strengthening their health workforces and the systems that support them at all levels and across the continuum of care.

IntraHealth is currently implementing a five-year USAID-funded Feed the Future Tajikistan Health & Nutrition Activity (THNA), which aims to improve integrated health care related to good maternal, newborn, and child health (MNCH) with an emphasis on nutrition, sanitation, and hygiene at the family, community, clinical, and national levels. THNA is seeking three UNC Fellows to work in Tajikistan on topics related to community health and MNCH. These fellowships provide a unique opportunity to contribute to global health as the Fellows work directly with the program. Fellows will gain practical experience in technical areas through their application of the skills they have learned in their degree programs.

The Tajikistan Health and Nutrition Activity

THNA works closely with the Tajikistan Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population (MOH) and other stakeholders to improve MNCH services at district-level health care facilities, help families improve nutrition and adopt healthy behaviors, promote improved awareness of the importance of nutrition at the national and regional level, and improve sanitation and hygiene at health care facilities and in communities. We provide training and equipment to maternity wards and primary health centers (PHCs), work in communities to improve child nutrition, collaborate with other projects on a range of food security issues, and contribute to the national dialogue on nutrition and maternal health policy. We work with 20 health care facilities and reach over 30,000 households in 700 villages with 50 paid staff and

1,400 village volunteers. THNA is focused on improving health care and nutrition for expectant mothers and their babies and on creating solutions that enable sustainable improvements in health care more broadly.

The communities where THNA is based are very poor. The villages have fairly reliable electricity, but little more in the way of public services. Village health centers—usually small concrete rooms—are the first resource for village women. From there they go to the nearest PHC. There are many PHCs, but most of them are deficient in equipment, staffing, knowledge, and skills.

You can learn more about the project at <http://www.intrahealth.org/>.

Visiting Tajikistan

Tajikistan is the poorest of the former Soviet states, but very livable. The towns and cities are modern, safe, comfortable, and pleasant. There are no particular concerns about safety and street crime is very rare. Summers are quite hot, but very dry, particularly in the south where THNA is based. The western edge of the project area is desert and the northern half of the country is mountainous. Travel is easy in Tajikistan and the roads are good. There is a ten-hour time difference from EST.

The 2017 THNA Fellowships

THNA envisions in-country work of 8-12 weeks for each of the three available graduate student fellowships listed below. The work of the Fellows is a serious and important part of our program. Your work is expected to be of high quality and will be presented to our partners at the MOH.

1. Community health

In a previous USAID-funded project, two volunteers were recruited and trained in each village to communicate the project's messages and information to the community. The volunteers also trained community members in a wide range of topics, including dietary diversity, the importance of nutrition for teenage girls, household budgeting, hand washing and hygiene, small scale agriculture, exclusive breast feeding, and much more.

In THNA, our plan is to enable half of community volunteers to serve as reliable community health workers. We will train them to recognize signs of stunting, malnourished teenage girls, danger signs in pregnancy, and a few other topics, so that the volunteers can work as useful and reliable partners of health care professionals.

The Fellow will contribute by working with the project team to develop a competency-based training curriculum and measurement and evaluation tools, review the current training materials, and make recommendations on how THNA can improve the training. The Fellow will assess our community health planning activities related to MNCH and recommend improvements through the application of global best practices.

2. A scholarly journal article

THNA conducted an assessment of the health care facilities in the project area in May-June 2016. A team of national experts and our staff followed an adapted assessment protocol of the World Health Organization with the objectives of identifying the availability and level of basic health care services for women and newborns at the outpatient level, the support system for the outpatient facilities, quality improvement processes regarding clinical conditions, and the guiding and organizational principles of the facilities. The assessment process continued through identifying key problems to be resolved in the provision of better medical care, initiating an evidence-based discussion with health facility staff on needed improvements and beginning the design of an action plan for improving the quality of services provided at each facility.

The WHO assessment process has been the subject of only one scholarly article, which examined the process in a project in Albania and did not contain any information about the use of the assessment in evidence-based decision making and objective evaluation of progress.

The fellow for this specific area will organize and begin preparation of a scholarly article on the assessment process in Tajikistan and the use of its information. This will include a review of the tools and techniques in place to measure improvement in service delivery, quality, and health facilities' capacity. There is potential for a follow-up fellowship next year to complete the work involving the writing of the journal article. Opportunity for authorship on a manuscript to be submitted with this fellowship opportunity.

3. Continuous medical education (CME)

"There has been zero progress in human resources. Nothing on education, licensing, CME... this places huge limits on everything we try to do. There are three universities teaching medicine, each with its own curriculum, and no licensing to practice at all." Such is the candid summary of medical training in Tajikistan from an EU representative.

THNA, working closely with the MOH over the past year, produced the first ever training course in nutrition for health care workers. THNA would like to transform this three-day seminar into a course for medical students. THNA also has a major focus on the capacity development of a cadre of national trainers. These are 24 professionals (neonatologists, family doctors, etc.) who are receiving capacity building from international experts on a range of topics related to MNCH.

THNA would like to move the MOH toward support of CME. The Fellow will outline a series of modules based on global best practices, information and research in order to create a basis for discussion on the structure and content of the CME program.

Support of the Fellows

THNA is prepared to fund one-half of your airfare, visa costs, in-country lodging, interpreters as needed, and in-country travel related to the assignment.

Application

Interested applicants should submit a resume, completed application form and other required supporting documents listed in the application form. The application form is available at <http://sph.unc.edu/global-health/ggg-internships-and-funding/#intrahealth>. On the application form, please note that we would like to know why this opportunity interests you and how you think this experience could add to your professional and personal development in addition to your qualifications.

Please submit the completed application form with the required supporting documents to GlobalGateway@unc.edu by January 27th, 2017.

We expect to have placements confirmed before the end of February 2017.

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