

Ensign Andrew Torrico

JRCOSTEP Summer Narrative

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Center for Tobacco Products

Silver Spring, Maryland

Hello, my name is Andrew Torrico. I am originally from Los Angeles, California on the West Coast. I am pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Environmental and Occupational Health at California State University, Northridge and I plan to graduate this coming December, 2017. I am pre-med and intend to attend medical school in the next few years. My major required an internship of at least 180 hours to graduate. I found out about this opportunity to work for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) via the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps through an officer's presentation in one of my lecture classes. After realizing that I met all the preliminary qualifications, I decided to apply. The most attractive part of this JRCOSTEP was the opportunity to gain experience from one of the most prominent organizations in my field.



My internship brought me to Silver Spring, Maryland – the other side of the country – for 11 weeks. I stayed in Downtown Silver Spring; a lively area just a 20 minute bus ride from the FDA's White Oak campus. While moving that far away for a summer may seem daunting to some, it proved to be a great experience. I worked under CDR Jonathan Kwan, my preceptor, in the Center for Tobacco Products, and was mentored by LTJG Rachel Forche. They showed me the ropes here, and helped me with everything from attaining my uniform to making sure I was enjoying myself on the weekends. I learned a great deal about public health while here.

This internship gave me a taste of what it is like to work as a USPHS Commissioned Corps Officer at the FDA. Being one of the most recognized and respectable organizations in the field of public health, I knew this internship would be able to offer me more than any other internship I had applied for. During my time here I was able to gain an in-depth understanding of the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, understand the workflow and processes of various professionals such as nurses, physicians, toxicologists, chemists, and more, assist in answering call center inquiries, attend various workgroup meetings, meet with physicians in CTP to understand their roles here, understand and live out the proper etiquette of being in the uniformed services, shadow a couple physicians from CTP, present at a branch meeting and at a Commissioned Corps Officers' meeting, tour the labs in the Center for Devices and Radiological Health, and see firsthand how the Emergency Operations Center would respond to a health crisis.

Among all other opportunities I have had here, I believe meeting with MDs was the most crucial experience for me. Every medical doctor here has a different role at the FDA, bringing their experience in the medical field to good use. Some physicians have left primary care entirely, while some continue to practice scarcely throughout the week. One of these is a former neurosurgeon. She now works in the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, dealing largely



L to R: LCDR Speckhart, ENS Kier, Phan, and Torrico

with drugs in the pediatric sector. Another medical doctor keeps up through literature about tobacco products and their subsequent health effects. As many research studies relevant to health effects of tobacco products cannot be done in clinical trials due to ethics, data collected secondhand becomes vital to the fundamental understanding of how humans react to tobacco products. Other medical doctors review clinical design trials, and bridge data from animal trials into useful information about humans.

My favorite experience here in the FDA has been receiving a tour of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) by LCDR Henry Allen. I met LCDR Henry Allen, of all places, while taking the Metro bus to the FDA. The EOC can be used in many different formats including surveillance or emergency response. When USPHS Commissioned Corps Officers partake in large events like July 4th celebrations or parades, the center will be used to “keep an eye” on the officers for their safety. The center utilizes video streams of all sorts, including TV news stations. The center is also used in cases of disease outbreaks or natural disasters, as has been done in during Hurricane Sandy in 2012. Response efforts are coordinated and monitored there.

This experience has been wonderful thus far. The comradery between officers here is unlike anything I have seen before. I was afforded the freedom to custom-fit the internship to my needs and wants, keeping my educational goal of one day becoming a pediatrician in mind. It has been exceptionally educational and rewarding. I learned a lot about myself, both as a professional and as an individual. I would definitely recommend this internship opportunity to anyone in my field.