Molly Pezzulo, “Global Health Alum,” Goes to Washington

She did not have to go far to find her passion for global health. She found it here, in the Capital Region. Molly Pezzulo, a Saratoga Springs native, received her B.S. in Public Health in 2015 from the University at Albany and then continued on to earn her MPH in Epidemiology at the School of Public Health in May of 2017.

“Having the exposure to a variety of public health courses during my undergraduate career provided me with a great foundation to pursue my Masters of Public Health, and it was without hesitation that I wanted to continue my graduate studies at Albany,” says Pezzulo. Like a growing number of students at the UAlbany School of Public Health, Molly is also working to complete a Graduate Certificate in Global Health Studies as an “add-on” to her MPH. She is on track to be awarded her certificate degree in December of this year.

Molly first learned of the University’s Center for Global Health through the School of Public Health Student Voices from the Field seminar. Having the opportunity to learn about her fellow students’ experiences living and working abroad opened the door for Molly to begin her career in global health.

Throughout the first year of Pezzulo’s MPH program, she worked closely with the directors of the Center for Global Health, John Justino and Carol Whittaker, as well as her academic advisor, Dr. Alvaro Carrascal, to pursue a global health focused internship. As a result, Molly spent the summer of 2016 as a Global Health Fellow at the World Health Organization (WHO) Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. More recently, she spent time working in Las Trojes, Honduras as a Research, Monitoring and Evaluation consultant for Pure Water for the World (PWW), a non-profit organization that partners with the UAlbany Center for Global Health.

“I would not have been given the opportunities to live and work abroad without the support of the Center for Global Health. UAlbany gives its students unique opportunities to work with faculty and foster professional relationships that last long after graduation.”

Pezzulo has carried her passion to serve others to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), within the Office of HIV/AIDS, where she is in the USAID Global Health Fellows program. According to Pezzulo, she first learned of this opportunity “while participating in the Center for Global Health’s seminar on careers in global health.”

At USAID, Molly currently focuses on advancing the integration of critical health services for underserved populations supported by the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Her projects involve two areas of health service integration: family planning and HIV targeting adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), and the role of nutrition on HIV and tuberculosis health outcomes.
Family Planning and HIV Integration

Research suggests that for many AGYW, pregnancy prevention may be a more immediate concern than HIV, therefore reproductive health and family planning programs can provide a platform to reaching AGYW with HIV services. AGYW must have access to the full range of contraceptives as well as high quality counseling and support to make informed and voluntary choices about behaviors and practices that will reduce the risk of poor health outcomes.

“Because pregnancy among young women is actually more of a concern than becoming HIV positive, this work is able to identify the wants and needs of young women to be able to offer them a tailored package of services for each girl.” says Pezzulo.

Nutrition and HIV Integration

Globally, at least one-third of the 36.7 million people living with HIV are co-infected with tuberculosis. Furthermore, throughout resource-limited settings HIV/TB infections are often highest where undernutrition is already prevalent. USAID’s research has worked extensively on providing nutritional care and support for patients with HIV/TB co-infection.

“HIV/TB co-infection is a vicious cycle that is difficult to break,” according to Pezzulo. “It seems like a simple solution: the faster nutritional recovery can be achieved through nutritional care, in combination with HIV and TB treatment, the better off the patient will be. However, barriers exist when trying to deliver effective and efficient integrated care.”

Molly says she feels “so fortunate to be working on two very comprehensive projects here at USAID. I am always learning something new every day.” She most recently had the opportunity to attend USAID’s 2017 Global Health Mini-University. She describes the event as “a day to share knowledge, research, and innovative practices among global health professionals.” Her work on family planning and HIV integration was presented, and she also published an article in the USAID Global Health Fellows II blog (click here to read).

“Having this experience at USAID has been incredibly rewarding, and I cannot thank my mentors at the University at Albany Center for Global Health enough for the support and guidance they have provided as I begin my career in Global Health.”

Ms. Pezzulo also looks forward to writing and publishing a paper on her work with the Bureau of Global Health.

For further information about the USAID Global Health Fellows Program, please visit www.ghfp.net.