

Reflections on my Summer with the Margolis Center for Health Policy

Shawin Vitsupakorn

My first formal exposure to global health was in the fall of my freshman year. Although Global Health 101 only lasted one semester, our class was able to trek through several case studies and face off in a grand competition on digital health interventions. To say the least, even the introductory course had left a mark on me. I was ready for more than the “dip-your-toes-in-water” experience.

This summer, my wishes were granted when I joined the Center for Policy Impact in Global Health (CPIGH). While I had a baseline understanding of the core issues at hand, I had never conducted global health research before. But thanks to the unwavering support of my mentors, along with a warm welcome from the CPIGH team and Margolis Center, I felt excited to be diving deep into a new realm.

In just eight weeks, I learned more than I could have ever imagined about public and global health. More specifically, I looked at Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), a publicly funded health insurance scheme that seeks to cover India’s poor and vulnerable. Its target beneficiary base is around 537 million people. As a frame of reference, the combined populations of the United States, Canada, and Mexico are estimated at just under 500 million. PM-JAY marks a monumental step toward universal health coverage for India, especially when considering its position as a lower-middle-income country and the historical underfunding of health by the government. PM-JAY was rolled out in late 2018, making it more important now than ever that we evaluate its implementation. With the CPIGH piloting this work with partners on the ground in India, I can’t wait to see what findings are brought to light beyond existing literature.

More broadly, my time with the Margolis Center and CPIGH has given me a front-row seat to how dynamic the field of public health is. It was incredible to witness how the two centers were adapting to the ever-evolving face of COVID-19, let alone be a part of the work environment. Perhaps on a bleaker note, we must recognize that even before the COVID-19 era, global health was – and continues to be – under constant threat. The pandemic has only amplified the issues that already disproportionately affected vulnerable populations. As a global community, we must have ongoing conversations on what we can do *better*, and not be complacent with the current state of affairs. We cannot put aside all of the personal loss that this pandemic has brought upon us. In the same vein though, we cannot excuse the systems that have allowed for it to happen.