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Developing the Public Health Workforce in Europe and in the Context of the Nordic Welfare Models

Practice-based abstract

Workshop

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Motivation for the workshop

The development of a sufficient and competent public health workforce is:

- A prerequisite for professional, evidence based, cost-effective and ethically optimal health education, health protection and disease prevention targeting the populations of the Nordic Countries;
- A prerequisite for socially sustainable solutions in the field of public health in the context of the Nordic welfare models;
- A central component in WHO's Health 2020 European Action Plan for Strengthening Public Health Capacities and Services (2012), as expressed in its Essential Public Health Operations No. 7.

Programme

Chairs: *Vesna Bjegovic-Mikanovic, Robert Otok*

1. The public health workforce: profiles and employers' expectations. *Vesna Bjegovic-Mikanovic*. 10 minutes.
2. Shaping the public health profession: the role of competences and Essential Public health Operations. *Anders Foldspang*. 10 minutes.
3. Development of an IT born, competences sustained tool for individual career as well as systems planning. *Robert Otok*. 10 minutes.
4. The indispensable leadership: the crucial role of the comprehensive public health professional. *Kasia Czabanowska*. 10 minutes.
5. Discussion, chaired by *Vesna Bjegovic-Mikanovic* and *Robert Otok*. 20 minutes.

Keywords

Public health education; training; continuing professional development/lifelong learning; workforce; systems planning; competences; IT; leadership.

1. The public health workforce: profiles and employers' expectations.

By Vesna Bjegovic-Mikanovic,

The competences acquired during the public health education have to support qualified public health workforce to solve dominating public health problems, as there are threats to humanity and planetary health (1, 2). Looking at the performance of public health workforce, while there are different published models of health system performance, very few of them exist in the field of public health (3). Starting from the WHO model, the contemporary approach assumes that performance varies and strives for success in achieving long-term objectives in solving public health challenges. Also, profiles of public health workforce fluctuate across Europe. There is a request for multidisciplinary teams of the workforce, however still without clear recommendations for its composition and skills mix. The Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER) is going ahead in this process (4). When analysing the status quo and planning for future needs, ASPHER considers education, training, and research to be core fundamentals in the development of public health workforce and determining their professional career.

ASPHER's survey identifies, in addition to exit-competences of graduates, the current as well as the desired performance of public health professionals as determined by their employers (5). The employers have considered that particular tasks need the performance of selected competences. It turned out that the regular performance of a particular competence is defined by what is "necessary" and driven by assigned tasks. Significant gaps are present between current and desired levels of performance on the job for all Essential Public Health Operations (EPHOs). The main expectations are with EPHOs related to preparedness and planning for public health emergencies, health protection operations, and core communication for public health.

Preparing public health workforce requires strong attention. Analysing the existing situation and planning for future needs, it is clear that education and research are core composite parts in advancing a strong public health profession. All together, governments have to realize that investing in the public's health workforce allows high returns.

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2. Shaping the public health profession: The role of competences and Essential Public Health Operations

By Anders Foldspang

Public health today is characterized by an increasingly Babylonian number of kingdoms with each their language and indispensable self-identity and conceptuality (1). The numbers of partial educational programmes and vocations are high (2). So, who are we – and to whom shall then decision makers turn for advice?

This challenge inspired the Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER) to include the shaping of an authorised public health profession in European countries, accountable for comprehensive and coherent public health in defined populations, as one of the main goals of its strategy (3).

The public health workforce will then be classified in three main categories (1,3):

- Public Health Professionals, defined by their comprehensive competences, as documented by academic public health degrees (bachelor, master, PhD) and/or specialization in public health;
- Health Professionals, e.g., physicians, nurses, midwives, with defined components of public health programmes as part of their vocational activity, e.g., vaccination, screening, breastfeeding instruction;
- All other with public health responsibility but without a formal degree in public health, e.g., decision makers, policemen in the street, teachers in the classroom.

The basis for authorisation of public health graduates will be their documented competences. ASPHER's programme for the development of lists of core competences – knowledge and skills – was started in 2006 based on contributions from member schools and departments of public health. The third edition of the lists of generic public health core competences (2011) (4) was endorsed by WHO Europe member states in 2012 (5). Following this, the European Public Health Reference Framework (EPHRF) was established with its Council of experts responsible for the continued development of the lists and for analysing and mapping the relationship between potential (competences) and public health action (WHO Europe's Essential Public Health Operations (EPHOS)) (6,7), and for following the development of the competences-EPHOS-population health challenges IT tool.

The process of shaping the authorisation will demand the collaboration of ministries of health as well as national public health associations.

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3. Development of an IT born, competences sustained tool for individual career as well as systems planning

By Robert Otok

ASPHER's European Public Health Reference Framework (EPHRF) Repository has been initiated to constitute a central and comprehensive source of information to serve as the basis for the planning of public health workforce and mapping of public health education and training, and job opportunities, associated with specific patterns of public health core competences and EPHO skills (1, 2). It should support and interact with accreditation of education and training programmes as well as authorization of individuals, thus, strengthen the formation of a professional culture, sustained by certified/licensed professionals responsible for population health.

The EPHRF Repository will be operationalized by an online tool built on the principles of the Population Health Challenges–Essential Public Health Operations (EPHOs)–Competences Model (the CEC Model), which takes into consideration the interactions between challenges of population health and health systems, which demand performance of adequate actions within EPHOs (as defined by WHO) and further require the necessary competences (as defined by EPHRF led by ASPHER) (3).

Thus, the EPHRF Repository's outputs will be able to advise:

1. The further development and adjustment of:
 - a. Education and training programmes.
 - b. Systems of public health service delivery.
2. The individual choice and adjustment of education and training for career planning.

After empirical data have been included in the Repository, it will be possible, at the systems level in a later phase of development, to study competences and EPHO profiles characteristic for

selected parts and countries of Europe, and their association with population health patterns, education and training capacity, and public health job market structures. Furthermore, such patterns may in the future be scrutinized as functions of, e.g., socio-economic status at individual as well as country levels, and as functions of health systems and public health systems structure, culture, tradition and development.

The EPHRF Repository's principles, methods and practice are applicable locally, across countries in Europe and globally.

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4. The indispensable leadership: the crucial role of the comprehensive public health professional

By Kasia Czabanowska

There is a documented realization of the vital role of leadership and governance in public health. Today public health professionals need to be able to lead in contexts where there is considerable uncertainty and ambiguity, and where there is often imperfect evidence and an absence of agreement about both the precise nature of the problem and the solutions to it (1). The presence of competent leaders is crucial to achieve progress in the field. Public health professionals need the skills to mobilize, coordinate and direct broad collaborative actions within the complex public health systems. Therefore there is a need for more adaptive, transformational, horizontal and multi-stakeholder leadership (2).

Although leadership is a well-known concept within organizational science, public health leadership has still not been well-defined. WHO includes "Strategic leadership for health" among the ten key areas of public health practice. The skills and competencies required by new public health professionals to create effective public health interventions in these complex health systems settings will not be the traditional technical and academic skills for a long time associated with public health alone but also the skills of effective leadership.

Professional development of public health leaders therefore requires the instruction, which is competency-based to help them develop the abilities to address complex and evolving demands of

health systems in order to improve the health of served populations (3). Considering the development, acquisition and assessment of new skills is the aim of this presentation.

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